

# The Hunt

by Cairdiuil Paiste

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Summary: Otto and the rest of the Nerd Herd must go on The Hunt - the most feared field exercise in H.I.V.E. But the former ruling council and a figure from Raven's past are furious at Dr. Nero and have decided to strike at the third year students first.

## 1. Prologues, Flashbacks and Rainbows

\_\*\*This is my new fic! Behold- The Hunt! It's at the start of book seven- Aftershock.\*\*\_

\_\*\*Otto and the gang must go on the scariest, toughest field exercise ever. Their goal is to evade capture by Raven and her elite G.L.O.V.E. team for as long as possible. Only thing is, they'll be in Siberia. In the Baikal Mountains which surround Lake Baikal, which holds a fifth of the world's freshwater. With winter temperatures of -25 degrees C. \*\*\_

\_\*\*Which means they're all screwed.\*\*\_

\_\*\*Plus there are some new students in H.I.V.E.\*\*\_

\_\*\*LET THE MAYHEM BEGIN!\*\*\_

\_\*\*Rated T because of death, bad language (it's Block and Tackle â€" what can you expect?), doom and gloom (dooooom and glooooo!) and violence. No H.I.V.E. story would be complete without Wing and Raven attacking some baddie. \*\*\_

\_\*\*I don't own H.I.V.E. I didn't pay Shelby enough to steal it for me. \*\*\_

\*\*\*Oh, by the way I reposted all four chapters plus the new one because I had some mistakes to correct. Hopefully it will make more sense now.\*\*\*

**\*\*PROLOGUE \*\***

The pain.

Dear God, the pain.

It hurt so much.

\_Someone make it stop!\_

A second blade whipped past his face. Glass fired everywhere. He could feel the blood trickling down his face.

\_This wasn't supposed to happen.\_

He looked up.

The cameras around him documented his every move, constantly adjusting their positions to get the best angle.

He gritted his teeth.

\_No-one \_would see him beg for mercy. If he was to die, he would do so without humiliating himself or those watching by asking for help. Neither would he cry and whine the pain was too much.

Well it kind of was too much. But if he just concentrated on each second, on keeping his composure, on not breaking down in front of those cameras for everyone to see.

One Mississippi.

\_Does she understand what measures have to be taken?\_

Two Mississippi.

\_If she does not, we are all lost.\_

Three Mississippi.

\_Then we are doomed.\_

A third and final blade came out of nowhere and buried itself high in his shoulder.

He staggered, and fell to his knees.

He knew there would be no more.

He knew death was imminent.

What are they thinking, those watching him from afar? Are they rejoicing in his death? Mourning him already? It didn't take a genius to know he was dying.

He always knew being part of G.L.O.V.E. would kill him. It had taken his father away from him, his mother, a grandfather and a grandmother.

He just didn't think it would be so soon.

The pain reached an all-time high and he bit his lip to avoid screaming out. The blood was pooling around him " \_his own blood\_ " it was almost like the shape of the lake above him. He bit back a maniacal laugh. To do so would expose a weakness, and if he knew anything about his days in H.I.V.E., it was not to show fear to your enemies.

His vision blurred.

He looked up into the nearest camera one last time, making the illusion he was making eye contact with everyone watching.

He fell on his side, thankfully not getting a blood facial.

His heart galloped towards its last beat.

He closed his eyes.

And died.

**\*\*MANY YEARS BEFORE\*\***

The woman strode quickly through the secret underground facility.

In the past she would have been interested in how exactly everything was made. How every scientist had been coerced away. How to escape detection by law enforcement agencies. How to access power to keep everything going.

\_Max would know. After all, he did construct H.I.V.E. Twice.\_

This one thought caused her stride to falter. She felt a stab of pain. She quickly strode onwards, past the admiring looks of the employees of the man she was going to see.

She reached her destination " a large office overlooking the main area of research.

He was waiting inside for her. Ever the same, but somehow different. He was cold. He had never been warm-hearted enough to love cuddly toys and shiny things but there was a difference.

He waited until she was standing next to him, looking out at the same view.

"They have succeeded. Subject 0110 has had the device interface directly into the brain. It will take a while to fully awaken in the boy. Ten years or so."

He looked over. Her face was indiscernible.

"May I see him?"

He turned and let her down the stairs, through the maze like hall until they stopped at a large cylinder, filled with liquid \_and a baby boy.\_

She moved closer.

\_Ingenious.\_

She flipped through the binder next to it, looking at and fully comprehending the formulae and equations. It was incredibly complicated. Nothing like this had ever been created before.

She looked up again.

The child's eyes were open.

They were a startlingly shade of blue.

"There is just one last thing, Isadoraâ€|"

He beckoned some scientists who wheeled something forwardâ€|.

Her eyes widened in shock.

**\*\*NOW\*\***

Mr. Block was having a good day.

The shower didn't switch between hot and cold faster than one of those kids trying to run away from him.

At breakfast no first years cut in front of him.

Instead they all gave him and his good friend Mr. Tackle their English breakfast muffins. Fifteen of them- all blueberry and chocolate. They were delicious.

He managed to knock out his sparring partner in Tactical Education with one blow. The Big C said he was tying with Mr. Tackle for head of the year for the Henchmen stream.

If it was anyone else, they would have fallen underneath a stalagmite. Or stalactite. Whichever one falls from the ceiling.

He got a message from Professor Pike saying he left a book behind. So it seems, did Mr. Tackle.

They quickly made their way to the Science & Technology Department.

Mr. Block liked the Technology stream.

They always did what they were told and never ratted him out.

The little nerds.

Now if Nigel Darkdoom had a title, it would be King of the Nerd Herd. The little baldie was always in the library, turning pages in books.

Idiot.

Books were only suitable for burning. And knocking people out with. Some of those books were pretty heavy.

He finally reached the Science and Technology Department.

Professor Pike motioned him to come on in. The henchmen's books were on his desk. The old man turned to point out something on some diagram that didn't make that much sense. Then Mr. Tackle poked him urgently.

"What," he grunted.

"Look who's in this class."

Mr. Block looked up and smiled. If it wasn't the King of the Nerds himself. What the fuck? The little bastard was smiling at him. Smirking in fact. As if he knew something Mr. Block didn't. He moved closer to the desk, accidentally knocking over a rack of test tubes, shattering them into teeny tiny pieces.

\_Fuck.\_

He covertly looked at the professor. He was now bending over Malpense and that Scottish ginger's machine thing.

He felt a slight tickling sensation. His skin tingled.

He felt another poke. "Yeah I know, we'll leave before he notices"-

"No! You're a rainbow!"

"Are you taking the piss?" He looked at himself. Oh shit. His skin was all multi-coloured- red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet (like that rhyme Mum used to say to him. He always said them everyday to her. Richard of York gave battle in vain) and all those other colours. Like puce. And vomit. And his personal favourite, blood red. He was like a fucking Christmas tree.

He heard the first few giggles.

Hesitant.

Which then enveloped into full blown laughs. Soon everyone was laughing at both of them "Baldie the hardest.

This was bad. Really bad. How can Mr. Tackle and he deal with their business when they're unable to intimidate anyone?

He looked up at the professor, ignoring Mr. Tackle's attempts to wash it off (which was only making it worse), "Sir get this off!" He glowered, attempting to coerce the scientist to do it out of fear. Only you can't be intimidating when you look like one of those multicoloured advertisements in Times Square.

"Off you go to your next class, boys! Wouldn't want you to be late!"

If Mr. Block didn't know better, he'd swear the old man was trying not to laugh. He uttered several curses and murmured some pleas but the old man would have none of it. He was ushered out into the crowds outside.

Who took one laugh at him and started laughing.

He looked back into the classroom. The King and his Nerd Herd waved at him.

"Where's the pot of gold?"

\_Fucking Darkdoom. He'll pay for this.\_

**\*\*Author's Note\*\***

**\*\*That, ladies and gentlemen, was chapter uimhir a haon! But it leaves such questions to be answeredâ€|\*\***

**\*\*Who dies in the future of this story?\*\***

**\*\*Who are the mysterious couple?\*\***

**\*\*Will Block and Tackle ever get the rainbow paint off?\*\***

**\*\*Some of these questions may never be answeredâ€|\*\***

**\*\*But some certainly will so I shall update soon!\*\***

â€|\*\*hopefully.\*\*

**\*\*Pardon my language, but hey, it's Block & Tackle. They who think in short sentences and small words.\*\***

**\*\*Please review! I'd love to hear what you think of it. Constructive criticism is welcome. Special thanks to spoonsaredangerous for reviewing. You are always my super cool editor! (Read her bones stories- they're awesome!)\*\***

## 2. News and New Students

\_\*\*I don't own H.I.V.E. Mark Walden does.\*\*\_

\_\*\*If I did, I'd be in a volcano. Eating pineapples. And chilling with the nerd herd. You know which one.\*\*\_

\_\*\*The first part of this fic was taken from Chapter Two of Aftershock- the seventh book in the H.I.V.E. series. I (obviously) don't own it. Well I want to own the book (who doesn't?) but I don't have that yet. I got the extract of the chapter from the H.I.V.E. website. You get to read a full chapter! The only thing is, it's chapter two which means chapter one must be a flashback. But about whaaaaaat? The plot thickensâ€|\*\*\_

**\*\*The Hunt\*\***

The main hall at H.I.V.E. fell silent as Dr Nero walked across the stage to the lectern. Standing in neatly ordered rows on the polished black granite floor in front of him were the third year students of H.I.V.E. They had come from all four corners of the globe but were united by one thing. They were the children who had demonstrated a gift for the nefarious or some talent for villainy, something uniquely special that had attracted the attention of H.I.V.E., the Higher Institute of Villainous Education. They were all being trained

in the art and science of villainy, being prepared, upon graduation, to take their place within the organisation known as G.L.O.V.E. The Global League of Villainous Enterprise was the most powerful clandestine group of international mega-villains that the world had ever known. The head of its ruling council, and also the headmaster of H.I.V.E., was Maximilian Nero, the very man who now stood in front of this particular group of students. He wore an immaculately tailored black suit with a white shirt and at his neck was a blood red cravat. Only the wide streaks of silver running through the jet black hair at each temple would have given an observer any hint as to his age.

'Good morning, students,' he said. 'I know that you are all busy studying for the forthcoming exams but I have gathered you here today to make a couple of important announcements. Firstly, we will soon be welcoming some new arrivals to the school. Most will be joining the lower years but a few will be joining you. These students will be unfamiliar with H.I.V.E. and will doubtless require some adjusting to their new home. I know it's unusual for us to take new students into the higher years of the school like this but I will still expect you to ensure that your new classmates are given a warm welcome.'

There was a brief murmur of discussion as Nero paused and scanned the crowd.

'Secondly,' Nero continued, as the students fell silent once more, 'I wanted to inform you that the groupings will shortly be announced for the field assessment exercise or to use the more lurid nickname it seems to have attracted . . . the Hunt. For many years this exercise has been an important part of the training for every student at H.I.V.E. and I have no doubt that some of the older students will have taken great pleasure in informing you about what it entails. For those of you who do not know, the Hunt is an assessment of both your wits and your physical fitness. You will be taken to an undisclosed wilderness location and given a one hour head start before elite G.L.O.V.E. forces, led by Raven, are sent after you. Beyond that there are no rules; you must simply evade capture for as long as you possibly can. In all the years that we have been running the Hunt no one has evaded the trackers for more than twenty-four hours. That is a record I would be delighted to see beaten by somebody in this room. You have one week before the Hunt begins " further details will be sent to your Blackboxes shortly. If you have any questions please direct them to H.I.V.. Please remember that this is merely the first stage of your examinations and, while I understand that the Hunt has a certain notoriety in the school, I do not want you to focus exclusively upon it. Additional time is being allowed within your existing timetables for extra revision periods and I urge you to take full advantage of the opportunity for extra study. I will expect you all to excel in your examinations, failure will have . . . consequences. Dismissed.'

Nero turned and walked off the stage as the students dispersed to their first lessons of the day amidst a buzz of excited chatter.

**\*\*H.I.V.E.\*\***

"That's interesting. I wonder what the new students will be like?"

Laura Brand tucked a strand of red hair behind her ear and looked at her companion. Otto was quiet. But then again, ever since Lucy took the bullets for him, he hadn't really been his normal boisterous self. Laura heard the shots every night in her dreams herself. Otto had gradually improved but often she found him in the grappler cavern. Just sitting in the most inaccessible spot and staring at the water.

"Otto?" She sighed and looked around Accommodation Block 9. Shelby and Wing were off doing God knows what, Franz was no doubt in the kitchens/at the vending machines/doing something involving food, and Nigel was probably hiding from Block and Tackle.

She sat down on a nearby couch. Otto sat next to her but for once she didn't feel ecstatic he was near her.

Somehow, Nigel Darkdoom managed to turn his tormentor's skin multi-coloured. She had no idea how he'd done it. The diminutive Darkdoom had been spending a lot of time in the Hydroponics department for the past few weeks. She'd assumed it was because of Lucy's death, which had changed everyone. Who knows what else he had been doing in there. Hopefully another relation of Violet's wouldn't appear. Then everyone would either kill the wee bald lad or feed him to his pet.

All she knows is, one minute they were in the lab and Block and Tackle were (relatively) normal. Then they were walking rainbows. She giggled.

"What's so funny, Brand? You saw your reflection?"

She looked up. Shelby Trinity and her boyfriend Wing Fanchu were smiling down at her.

"Nope, nothing as entertaining as that. I just remembered the sight of H.I.V.E.'s very own walking rainbows."

They all laughed.

Shelby wiped tears from her eyes. "Wow. I mean, that was just great. And it's been three days and they haven't managed to clean it off."

"I love Christmas tree lights," said Wing with a straight face, sending the girl's into peals of laughter, attracting the attention of a rather plump German boy.

"Hey guys. What is being up?" said Franz Argentblum.

"Oh, you know, nothing much."

"Just the sky."

"And the ceiling."

"Don't forget those delightful stalactites!"

"If you're lucky, you might even see a rainbow!"

Franz grinned. "Ja, I liked that sight very much. Speaking of



rainbows, where is Nigel? The new students will be in here soon, I think."

Laura looked around. "Oh I think he's there"-

A crowd of third year girls parted to reveal the Darkdoom heir. He said something to them and they giggled. He walked quickly over to his friends, missing one or two of the girls collapse. Otto perked up and smiled evilly. He sensed comedy gold.

"Well, well, well, Mr. Darkdoom. Bored of your fanclub?"

Nigel looked confused. "My fanclub? I don't have a fanclub. At least I don't think I do"-

"Hi Nigel!" said a voice behind him. He turned around. "Hi! Daynah, right? Technical Stream?" The blonde haired girl froze. "You know my name?" Nigel nodded. "Yeah, you're in my Political Science class, right?" She uttered a high-pitched squeal and ran off to her friends who immediately huddled and walked towards the lifts.

"That's the third time this week! It's really creepy!" said Nigel looked really confused.

"You're so like Otto, Nigel," said Shelby. "Oh I agree," said Laura. "A genius in some things but in othersâ€¦".- "A total retard."

"Thanks, Shel. My self-esteem \_really\_ needed that one."

"Look! The new students are coming!" said Otto. They all looked and saw Ms. Gonzales, Head of the Hydroponics Department, lead a group of students into the room. She said something to them and left while they sat down on some couches near the waterfall.

.

"Shall we roll out the H.I.V.E. welcome wagon?" Otto smirked.

"Again with this wagon. It makes no sense," said Wing.

They strolled over to the group, who were busy goggling at the large cavern with stalactites, a waterfall and the accommodation block itself. There were five of them. A small Asian girl and a tall, broad-shouldered black boy were conversing with a dark-haired white girl. A girl around Shelby's height was looking around, at anything and anyone. She seemed Hispanic. A pale faced blonde boy then engaged her in conversation.

"Welcome to H.I.V.E., ladies and gentlemen!" said Otto with a smile. "I assume you're the new students?" Without waiting for a reply, he carried on. "My name is Otto Malpense, genius extraordinaire!" "Wouldn't go that farâ€¦" someone behind him muttered. Ignoring them, Otto continued on his introductions. "This is Wing Fanchu â€" he's tall, dark and lacks a sense of humour!" "You will lack something else if you do not keep quiet, Otto." "The fairly intelligent blondie here"- "HEY! WATCH IT!" â€" "is Shelby Trinity. This bald little munchkin"- "HEY! I'M TALLER THAN YOU!" â€" "is Nigel Darkdoom. The German trigger-happy dude here is Franz"- "SILENT DEATH!" â€" "Argentblum. And this amazing red-haired hacker is Laura Brand."

"I don't know whether to be pleased that you just complimented me or annoyed that you insulted everyone else." "I'd go with the second one."

"You will never introduce us to anyone again," said Nigel, glaring at Otto. "I agree." Said Wing. "Me too." "Me three." "Me four."

"Anyway, who are you guys?" said Laura, smiling at the new students.

"I'm Vivienne Beauregard," smiled a dark-haired girl with lively violet eyes. Her hair was parted to the side, and the rest of her long tresses were tied back in a long plait. She had an onyx stone tied to the end. Her features were vaguely familiar to Otto.

With a look at her companion, the small Asian girl opened her mouth. "My name is Adeline Yen Li. I'm Chinese." She was petite, with her black hair in an elegant bun. Her brown eyes looked at everyone intently, noting everything.

The broad-shouldered black boy smiled warmly. "Hey guys, I'm Arthur Richardson. But you can call me Arty. I'm from New York." He smiled and his white, perfect teeth flashed. His brown eyes carefully sized everyone up, betraying no emotion.

The Hispanic girl flicked her hair behind her shoulder. "My name," she began, batting her eyelids, "is Nancy Russo. I am from Argentina. Or at least, I used to be, before some crazy Russian woman kidnapped me and brought me to a school for super-villains in a volcano." She scowled.

Shelby grinned. "Yes, it's completely normal, right?" The others laughed and the American was rewarded with a cool smile.

Franz looked at the last newcomer. "What is being your name?"

The pale boy inclined his head regally. "I am Stephen Campbell Parker," he said in an upper-class British accent. His light blue eyes were like shards of ice in his face. His teeth were perfect, as was his smile. He looked at everyone with just a hint of disdain. Here, was someone who had always gotten what he wanted.

"So, some of you guys have to tutor us, right?" said the American boy.

Otto looked sideways at Laura. \_Tutoring?\_ She shrugged.

Just then everyone's Blackboxes beeped urgently. Shelby flipped hers open to find outâ€¦|.

"I have to tutor you guys? Like, seriously? I had Goddamn better not miss water polo practiceâ€¦|.."

**\*\*H.I.V.E.\*\***

"So what do you think of the newbies, Laura?"

Laura looked up from her laptop at her roommate. "I don't know, they seem interesting. I guess we'll get to know them better soon

enough."

"The boys are cute but Wing's still cuter. I mean seriously, have you seen his ass?"

Laura tuned out Shelby's endless praise about her boyfriend and focused on the list on her Black box.

\_Laura Brand must tutor Adeline Yen Li and Nancy Russo in Science & Technology.\_

\_Otto Malpense must tutor Arthur Richardson, Stephen Campbell Parker and Vivienne Beauregard in Science & Technology.\_

\_Franz Argentblum must tutor Adeline Yen Li, Vivienne Beauregard, Arthur Richardson, Stephen Campbell Parker and Nancy Russo in Simulator Training.\_

\_Wing Fanchu must tutor Adeline Yen Li, Vivienne Beauregard, Arthur Richardson, Stephen Campbell Parker and Nancy Russo in Tactical Education.\_

\_Shelby Trinity must tutor Adeline Yen Li, Vivienne Beauregard, Arthur Richardson, Stephen Campbell Parker and Nancy Russo in Stealth & Evasion.\_

\_Nigel Darkdoom must tutor Vivienne Beauregard and Adeline Yen Li in Hydroponics.\_

\_All tutoring is compulsory. Failure to attend will have dire consequences. \_

Laura tilted her head to the side. \_This should be interestingâ€|\_

**\*\*H.I.V.E.\*\***

Vivienne Beauregard sat on her bed in her new room. Her roommate Adeline was in the bathroom. H.I.V.E. seemed strange. And the worst thing was, she was joining in late. And she hated other people getting a better chance at something than she did. Well she was highly competitive. She flicked through one of her textbooks. Then flung it back down again with a sigh. She didn't want tutoring. She didn't need tutoring. And why the hell was she here anyway? Was there anything new H.I.V.E. could teach her? She stretched out her fingers. She certainly didn't need help in certain things at any rate. Considering what she'd doneâ€|

Adeline came in from the bathroom. "What do you think of this place?"

"Apart from I want to run away? Nothing really."

Adeline nodded her head. "Otto Malpense certainly reacted when I asked him has anyone ever escaped."

Vivienne laughed. "Yes, because jumping in his seat and mumbling that they got dragged back in again is really helpful. I bet he tried to escape before."

"I agree. Laura, Shelby and Wing were jumpy as well."

"If by jumpy you mean widen their eyes fractionally, then yeah. You're quite the observer, Addy."

The Chinese girl raised an eyebrow. "Addy?"

"Everyone deserves a nickname. Now that Nancy seems suspiciousâ€¦"

Adeline laughed. "You mean she got hit on more than you did at dinner."

"Exactly what I mean."

"I have Hydroponic tutoring with Nigel Darkdoom tomorrow." Adeline leaned in subconsciously. "Do you think he's one of \_the Darkdooms?\_" she whispered, eyes wide with curiosity.

Her roommate nodded. "There's no doubt a child from every prominent crime family in this school. Tomorrow should be interesting. Our first full day in H.I.V.E. Now is that scary or what? We should probably get to sleep."

The two quickly got ready to go to sleep but slumber eluded them. Tomorrow was definitely going to be interesting.

**\*\*H.I.V.E.\*\***

WAAH! WAAAAAAAAAH! WAAH!

The three trumpet notes symbolised the end of another day in H.I.V.E. Doors opened and students poured out. Noise filled the previously silent corridors.

"What did you think of your first day in H.I.V.E., Adeline?" said Franz.

"Oh it was quite different to what I'm used to. We have a cat for a teacher. A big, furry white one." Adeline smiled at him.

"What are you being used to?" he replied.

"My father is an industrialist in Beijing. He remarried over a year ago and my stepmother sent me to boarding school. I've barely seen him since. What about your family?"

Franz looked nostalgic. "I was growing up in a castle in Germany with my biggest extended family. Then I wakes up here. I have not been eating the testers for my father's chocolate company in so long! Where is you living your childhood Vivienne?"

Vivienne looked at the two, her expression angry. "I travelled around a lot. Look, I'll see you guys later." And with that she strode off, losing herself in the crowds.

Franz and Adeline looked at each other, confused.

"What's up with Vivienne?" came a voice behind them. Adeline decided Stephen and Arty were looking far too interested for their own good.

"She forgot something in the room. We'll meet up with her later!" she lied convincingly.

Or so she thought.

**\*\*H.I.V.E. \*\***

**\*\*Author's Note\*\***

**\*\*Ladies and Gentlemen: Chapter Two! The plot thickensâ€¦.\*\***

**\*\*Who are these mysterious new students? Will they cause trouble for the nerd herd ( \_I love this phrase!\_), or shall they be the best of friends (pfffffft. Lame.) ? Will Block and Tackle send the King of the Nerd Herd home in a matchbox? When will the (eventual) baddie appear? And when shall I procure a copy of Aftershock? \*\***

**\*\*Thanks to Ruth for editing (again). Chapter Three shall be coming soon!\*\***

**\*\*cairdiuil paiste\*\***

**\*\*(irish for kid friendly. It's a loooooooooong story.)\*\***

### 3. Russians, Lucy and Black Widow spiders

**\*\*The Hunt: Chapter Three\*\***

**\*\*Spoilers ahead ladies and gentlemen for Zero Hour, Escape Velocity and pretty much every other book in the H.I.V.E. series. Read on at own riskâ€¦.\*\***

**\*\*Oh and I \_finally\_ got Aftershock! It was amazing! But the ending was such a shocker. I like P's pink hair though. \*\***

**\*\*I don't own H.I.V.E. I tried to nab it but Wing found out and guilt-tripped me so I gave it back. Dishonourable this and dishonourable that.\*\***

Valentin Obolensky stared down at Lake Baikal.

He was in the process of climbing up one of the mountains surrounding the lake. He had turned around to look down on Russia's so-called Jewel of Siberia. Below him was one fifth of the Earth's unfrozen freshwater. The sight was awe-inspiring. But as ever, he had work to do, and so he continued to trudge up the mountain.

A tall broad-shouldered man with pale blonde hair and ice blue eyes, Obolensky was a descendant of powerful Russian nobles. His ancestors had controlled the czars and their families and so had controlled the motherland itself.

If it were up to him, he would still be in Moscow, running G.L.O.V.E.'s Russian operations, reporting only to Number One himself.

But Number One was dead.

And Diabolus Darkdoom had taken his place. But after an attempt on

his life that had left him on life support in H.I.V.E. itself, he had stepped down to be replaced by his old headmaster " Maximillian Nero.

Who had then disbanded the ruling council and replaced it with former students of Nero's prized hamster cage - H.I.V.E.

After loyally serving G.L.O.V.E. for years, it was outrageous how he was treated. Therefore Nero must pay. It had come to Valentin's attention that the exercise known as the Hunt would be taking place soon " outside of school territory. And he had a reliable source telling him it would be in Siberia, Lake Baikal to be precise.

Which was why he was trudging uphill in order to get to a secret facility hidden in the mountainside. Nero had no idea it was here. Valentin had had it constructed secretly several years ago. Just as well.

The Russian reached an outcropping of rocks. He carefully made his way to one of the largest, the highest one up the mountain. He carefully lowered himself between that rock and another one next to it. His feet came close to the snowy ground, passed right through it and touched a firm surface. It started moving down into the ground. He straightened up, and turned for one last look at the lake as he descended into the mountain.

**\*\*H.I.V.E. \*\***

Arty crept through the deserted warehouse, senses on high alert. He heard a sound behind him.

"It's just me! Adeline! Mind if I tag along with you for a while?" He nodded and the Chinese girl followed him as they clambered up the crates to get a better vantage point.

Adeline gasped.

Arty spun around to see a knife buried to the hilt in her heart. Her hands were outstretched and there appeared to be a garrotte in them. He saw a flash and then another knife flew into his stomach. He collapsed and everything went black.

**\*\*H.I.V.E.\*\***

Wing whistled softly. Whoever threw that had excellent aim. He, Shelby, Otto, Laura and Nigel were watching the others on a big screen while they crept around in the Agoniser suits.

"Who was that?" said Nigel. "I'm thinking either Nancy or Vivienne. They look naughty enough to have played with sharp things as kids," smirked Shelby. "And Arty didn't notice that Adeline was going to cut his throat. Tut tut tut. Despicable."

"Oooh! Look! Someone's trying to sneak past Franz," said Laura.

"Wait for it! Oh yes! Head shot by Mr. Argentblum. He just killed Nancy." Otto leaned back with a contented sigh. This was better than tv. Especially those blithering idiots on some of those reality tv shows.

Today had been interesting. Otto had assessed the new students with interest. They all seemed fairly competent and had probably received some training. But they seemed to be holding something back. Arty relied on his charming manner and persuasive ways to get things done. Perhaps he would have been better off in the Political/Financial stream than the Alpha. Adeline appeared docile and quiet but that only gave her the excuse to watch everyone. There wasn't much she missed. Her roommate, Vivienne, shied away from questions about her family and displayed remarkable skills in Stealth & Evasion and Tactical Education. Nancy Russo was an excellent manipulator and generally got those around her to do what she wanted. Stephen Campbell Parker was highly intelligent and easily settled into the academic life of H.I.V.E. He also handled a gun like a pro.

Otto's gaze fell upon his friends. Lucy's death had affected everyone. It had changed their behaviour, made each of them quieter. They each had their own way of grieving.

Laura had taken to furiously creating better and more capable hacking programs, as if diving head-first into her work could help her forget the awful sound of the bullets ripping into Lucy's shoulder.

Franz was constantly practicing his marksmanship, firing round after round. Shooting with a vengeance as if Pietor Furan was just behind the red bulls-eye. Glaring at anyone who commented on the sudden tear that often appeared in his eye.

Shelby went on her own to the pool where the boy's water polo team practised and sat remembering the times all of the girls had gone there. She even repeated Lucy's, Laura's and Shelby's prank where they put an electric eel in the pool to play with the polo boys.

Nigel spent most of his time in the greenhouses, working hard to examine new poisons and creating their cures. He even named a new poison "Dexter", which first paralysed his victims, then allowed him to control their every move.

Wing mediated constantly, then spent hours perfecting his martial arts techniques, making damn sure that he would be able to help his friends if something like that happened again.

Otto himself had nightmares each night but the person he left behind wasn't always Lucy Dexter. Last night it had been Laura, the night before Wing. In the past few weeks, Shelby, Franz and Nigel had taken her place. And it hurt just as much. He sometimes sat in the grappler cavern where Lucy had first revealed her feelings for him. There he gazed at the water beneath and just thought. Laura found him there a couple of times and she always took his hand gently in hers and led him back to the others.

He shook his head to banish away the memory of his last glimpse of his ex-girlfriend. Did that technically make him a widow or something?

"Otto, are you alright?"

Otto turned to see Nigel staring at him with a concerned expression. "Oh, yeah, I'm fine. Don't worry about it Nigel. Which reminds me,

how is your fanclub these days?"

Otto grinned as Nigel buried his face in his hands and groaned loudly. It really was so much fun to tease the Darkdoom heir. He used to mock Shelby but one glare from her Japanese ninja boyfriend and that door closed. But the one he was looking at right now was wide openâ€|

**\*\*H.I.V.E.\*\***

Valentin Obolensky was staring impassively at a large screen displaying different reports from his loyal followers. He concentrated on the noises behind him and soon judged all of his operatives were present. He pirouetted around (well 'turned' to sound more macho. It wouldn't do to let his enemies find out his secret love of the Bolshoi Balletâ€|.)

"You all want to know why you are here. Some of you are loyal men and women who have served me for years. Others are operatives of Joseph Wright and the rest of the former ruling council. Those left came here from the Glasshouse, the most sophisticated training centre in Europe that is run by the Disciples and that even G.L.O.V.E. has no control over.

"Maximillian Nero has gone too far. In disbanding the ruling council he has accumulated dangerous enemiesâ€|. I intend to strike the first blow.

"I have information from a reliable source that the third year students of H.I.V.E. â€" from all the streams (Science & Technology, Political/Financial, Henchmen and Alpha) â€" will be embarking on an important field exercise outside of their school and the out from under the shadow of their headmaster. The exercise, known as the Hunt, will take place here, in the motherland. To be precise, Lake Baikal and the surrounding mountain range itself."

There came a murmur from the assembled crowd. The reason for their deployment to Siberia was explained. More thoroughly than the order to drop everything and make their way to Russia, at any rate.

"Our plan is thus.

"The students of H.I.V.E. will be alone.

"Outnumbered.

"Outgunned.

"We will then send our own teams out to catch them. Before Raven and her elite G.L.O.V.E. forces can get a chance to take them back to their gilded cages. Among the students are the sons and daughters of some of the most powerful masterminds of our time. For example, the heir to the Darkdoom criminal empire is a third year student. With him alone we could control the most influential criminal family in the world."

Another murmur swept through the crowd, even louder than before.



"Imagine what we could do with an entire year of juvenile criminals.

"The holding cells have been prepared and in case of an emergency, protocols have been established to move everyone to another facility."

What he didn't mention to his men and women was that if Nero caught wind of his plans and sent Raven after him, he would flee with the most important students and gas the rest. The Darkdoom boy would be one, along with the Argentblum heir. Otto Malpense and Vivienne Beauregard would also be taken. The Disciples had spoken to him at length about those students. They would be the perfect assassinsâ€¦

As for the others, their abilities would be observed. The more useful they could be to his operations, the longer they would live. Perhaps he would send the children of his operatives to a school of Villainy. One under the control of the Disciples, of course.

Valentin Obolensky smiled.

"The students will be here in 72 hours. And remember, \_I will not tolerate failureâ€¦|\_

**\*\*H.I.V.E.\*\***

"This is belladonna. Most people have heard of deadly nightshade even if they have never seen it. The combination of its ability to kill with its use to beautify by dilating the pupils gives it a romantic attraction which is hard to beat. Add to that the hallucinations it may also cause and its fascination is complete.

"Symptoms may be slow to appear but last for several days. They include dryness in the mouth, thirst, difficulty in swallowing and speaking, blurred vision from the dilated pupils, vomiting, excessive simulation of the heart, drowsiness, slurred speech, hallucinations, confusion, disorientation, delirium and agitation. Coma and convulsions often precede death.

"That's it for today, I suppose. It'll take some time to go through the theory and practicals for Hydroponics. But we are at an advantage to the class because with less people, we can move much faster through the coursework. Any questions?" said Nigel, looking at Adeline and Vivienne.

They shook their heads. For the last hour, Nigel had patiently gone through several plants that can be found in any British garden. It had been fascinating to hear the exact symptoms and learn how to carefully extract the poisons. But Vivienne had found observing her companions far more interesting. Adeline had been attentive but demure, taking into account everything her tutor said. Nigel was quite confident conversing about the best ways to grow tulips and daffodils to use the bulbs of each plant to harm your enemies.

Vivienne stretched and smiled like a cat. "Who do you test your poisons on?"

"Nero has forbidden me from trying them out on other students after

that Henchmen OD'd on a special toxin which made him cater to my every whim. It was good while it lasted." Nigel looked into space nostalgically.

"What did you make him do?" said Adeline, eyes wide with curiosity (Or at least Vivienne \_thought\_ it was curiosity. For some unknown reason she was annoyed at the thought).

"Throw Otto over the cliff in the grappler cavern, stop Block & Tackle from flushing my head down the toilet every three hours, raid caviar from the kitchens, throw a cream pie at Otto every time he opened his mouth to annoy me, steal food for Franz, nab several books I'm technically not allowed to read from the library, teach me the successive day's Tactical Education techniques so I don't make an absolute fool of myself and pop out behind corners at Otto so he practically wets his pants. Which he did at one point. The only thing is, Eugene became so addicted to the toxin, that he took too much of it and had to be taken to the infirmary. I got a severe reprimanding from Dr. Nero and as punishment had to give the formula to Ms. Gonzales and make a large amount of it for use in G.L.O.V.E. operations."

Adeline and Vivienne exchanged an amused glance. "Eugene?"

Nigel shrugged. "He says his mother thought it would give him an air of grandeur when she named him. But considering his brother was called Quigleyâ€¦".

They all laughed and Nigel was struck at how pretty their laughs sounded. He covertly gazed at the two girls in front of him. Adeline was petite with a delicate bone structure and her eyes were a pretty chocolate brown colour,. Vivienne was taller with glossy, thick, dark brunette hair threaded with gold strands. Her eyes were a mysterious violet colour, but there was something strange about them. He noticed they were looking at him with a strange look and quickly realised he was staring. Luckily before he could blush a diversion came about. Though with hindsight, he would have gone with the blush.

"DARKDOOM! WE KNOW YOU'RE HERE IN YOUR LITTLE BATCAVE!"

\_Eh oh.\_

Nigel quickly popped down under the counter. \_"I was never here, understood?"\_

The girls had barely enough time to murmur their assent when Block and Tackle materialized out of (what appeared to be) thin air.

"Where is he? Where's the King of the Nerd Herd?" scowled Block while Tackle looked on threateningly.

Which of course is difficult to do when your skin is multi-coloured (Yes it hadn't come off).

Which was why Vivienne Beauregard and her roommate Adeline Yen Li were staring at the boys in front of them. First Nigel had stared at them for God knows how long and now two walking rainbows that claimed to be in the Henchmen stream were talking to them about the afore-mentioned boy. And Block and Tackle expected them to be able to

reply coherently?

"Well?" growled Tackle, moving closer to the Alphas. He then stopped and looked at them properly. Making a grotesque attempt to smile, he said, "We only wanted to return some, uh, homework that he forgot in the library. Do, uh, do you two ladies know where he is?"

Vivienne and Adeline continued to stare at them, their minds struggling to keep up.

Block and Tackle ogled them back and there was complete silence.

Under the counter, Nigel was starting to get cramps after ten minutes cooped up in a cupboard. He noticed with horror that it was very dusty in there and something in the shadows was watching him. A black widow spider to be precise. \_This is bad, reeeeeeally badâ€¦|\_

The spider stared at him and so another staring contest ensued in the greenhouse. Nigel slowly reached out and the spider crawled onto his hand. He slowly reached out with his other hand to gently stroke the spider. He then removed his hand and took a small glass vial filled with blood out of his pocket (he was meant to feed the various carnivorous plants after this, but that would have to wait). He poured some onto his hand and the spider immediately went over to drink it. He watched as the spider's stomach expanded and soon all the blood was gone. At least now it wouldn't bite \_him.\_

Nigel strained his ears to try and figure out what was going on. Had Block & Tackle left yet? Had they taken Adeline and Vivienne somewhere else? \_What was happening?\_

Nearly fifteen minutes after Block and Tackle appeared, the Alphas were still staring at the Henchmen and the Henchmen were still staring at the Alphas. The silence was somehow deafening.

Nigel popped up from under the counter with a spider on his shoulder. \_"I thought you were going to get them away?"\_

"Oh, hey Nigel," said Vivienne. "Yeah, sup," followed Adeline.

Block and Tackle looked at Nigel. "\_Darkdoom!\_ We've been looking for you!"

"From what I see, we have two options," said Nigel, looking at his fellow Alphas. "Plan A is to talk our way out of this. So, Block and Tackle, ever realise you two wouldn't be here if it weren't for all of my friends?"

Block and Tackle growled like a pair of pitbulls and flexed their impressive muscles.

"Okay, so that clearly won't work. Plan B it is then. We throw carnivorous plants at them and hide."

Adeline looked confused. "But this is the Greenhouse Three where the small poisonous plants are kept. The carnivorous plants are in the next room."

Nigel frowned. "Then we'll just have to go with Plan Bâ€¦|"

Block and Tackle looked at each other, also confused. "But you already said what Plan B was..." began Block.

Nigel grinned. "Then there is hope for the Neanderthals after all! Now RUN!" And with that, he grabbed the girl's wrists and led them out of the Hydroponics Department, all of them laughing.

Tackle started counting on his fingers. "But there can't be two Plan Bsâ€¦|..can there?"

**\*\*H.I.V.E.\*\***

**\*\*The end of Chapter Three! Special thanks to spoonsaredangerous and ItsMeMashyNee for reviewing\*\***

â€¦|**\*\*..the first chapter. This is Chapter Three!\*\***

**\*\*Who is Valentin Obolensky's mole in G.L.O.V.E.? Who now controls the Disciples? Will the black widow eat Nigel? Will Block and Tackle understand the enigma of two plans with the same name?\*\***

**\*\*Thank you, Ruth, for being my editor! No-one else would put up with my hare-brained schemes!\*\***

**\*\*Please review! Constructive criticism is welcome! (I'd be kicked out faster than Franz racing to get to dinner if I disallowed them) Tell me what you think about the new students and the baddie! Anyone who's read Aftermath must PM me so we can discuss its awesomeness! \*\***

**\*\*cairdiuil paiste\*\***

#### 4. Dictionaries, Death and Dumb Henchmen

**\*\*The Hunt - Chapter Four\*\***

**\*\*Chapter Four is now here! Enjoy! \*\***

**\*\*Disclaimer: I don't own H.I.V.E. â€" Mark Walden does. Do you really think I would be able to smuggle it out past security?\*\***

"I don't understand why didn't he just build a laser and put \_that\_ into orbit instead of going to all the trouble of constructing a fully manned space station."

Otto looked at Stephen Campbell Parker. They were in the library alongside Franz and Arthur studying for upcoming exams.

"What Dr. Nero and H.I.V.E. are trying to teach us is that we must strive to achieve the unachievable, bring villainy to new heights and smash previous records. Our plans and plots will be expected to have a certain style, elegance, a \_je ne sais quoi\_. That's why Diabolus Darkdoom went to the trouble of building a space station and replacing not just any country's president, but the \_America's \_with an android replica. Nero wants us to succeed in all of our ventures with finesse and grace. It may sound pointless, but it's worth it in the end."

Stephen nodded carefully and looked down at his notes again, frowning slightly.

Arthur looked up, interested. "Seriously? How come none of my fellow Americans noticed? And did we get him back?"

Franz smiled evilly. "I was asking Nigel about that one day, and he said his grandfather used to tell him of the time an American politician lived in the basement. I am thinking that your president was returned. At a cost, of course."

They all laughed.

Stephen gave a low whistle. "Now who is \_that?\_"

Arty pulled out a mirror from his pocket and discreetly angled it so it looked behind them. Franz and Otto peered over his shoulder to see a tall, striking blonde girl wearing a grey jumpsuit glide through the library.

"Oh, that is being my girlfriend," said Franz, offhandedly.

"\_What?\_" said Arty in shock.

Otto snorted. "And Nigel's my fiancÃ©. Do you honestly believe him?"

"She's coming over here!" whispered Arty. All four of the boys straightened and self-consciously pulled at their black jumpsuits. "\_Noooooooooooo not noooooow!\_" Franz wailed as he saw two familiar figures storm into the room. "Why can't they be looking to kill someone somewhere else?"

All the boys groaned and Otto quickly scanned the room to look for an escape route. "Alright, we'll hide in that crowd of sixth year Alphas and sneak out of the library. Maybe we can talk to her some other time."

They quickly gathered up their books and crept over to their fellow Alphas. "Uh, hey guys. Mind if we tag along with you until we get to Accommodation Block Nine?" Otto looked up into the faces of the senior Alphas. Damn his shortness.

One of them, a tall, broad shouldered boy with carelessly tousled black hair smiled at them. "Running from some Henchmen, gentlemen? It's no bother, just go in the middle. Malpense, Otto Malpense, isn't it?"

The third year Alphas gratefully mingled into the crowd, making sure they couldn't be seen by anyone in the library. Otto found himself next to the Alpha he had talked to earlier. "Pardon my manners, I forgot to introduce myself. Clark Thomas." Otto grinned back. "You already know my name. Where are you from?" The group was nearing the doors. "London." "Really? So am I!" Otto continued to chat away but kept a close eye through the moving crowd to see whether his favourite Henchmen would discover their ruse to escape their detection.

Block and Tackle were near the exit. Block was surveying the crowd,

while Tackle was scratching his head and muttering to himself. Otto passed close enough to them that he held his breath. He then frowned. He could have sworn that Tackle kept on saying something about two Plan Bs.

Meanwhile, Otto noticed that Franz was conversing in what sounded like German to a slight, dark-haired Alpha. They used their hands a lot while speaking and were soon sniggering at some joke. Arty was laughing at a comment made by an Asian boy who Otto perceived to be from Hawaii. Stephen was listening intently to two senior Alphas telling him about their experience of the Hunt, grimacing slightly.

He looked up at Thomas to find him discreetly observing another sixth year Alpha giggling with her friends. Thomas saw Otto watching and punched him in the shoulder. "Do you want to get out of this place or not?" They casually proceeded out of the library and just managed to see Block and Tackle sweep entire shelves of books onto the floor while screaming "I KNOW YOU'RE HERE!" and peering into each empty shelf to see whether their prey was lurking behind a lone dictionary.

**\*\*H.I.V.E.\*\***

Shelby frowned and glared in the general direction of her Japanese ninja boyfriend.

"Wing! Take this blindfold off me and tell me where we're going!" True to character, Wing didn't say a word and if it weren't for his hands gently guiding her along the route to this mysterious place, she would have thought he wasn't there at all. She stamped her foot, and Wing had to suppress a smile at his girlfriend's antics.

Before Shelby could explode into another long winded speech (there had been twelve or so already), Wing leaned in closer and whispered in her ear, "We are here."

He gently removed her blindfold and stared deep into her eyes. Her emotions changed from anger and annoyance to confusion. She broke eye contact and looked around.

And gasped.

Shelby had never been one of those romantic girly girls but she could feel her heart melt as she looked at the scene in front of her. A basket full of delicious smelling food lay on a red and white chequered blanket. There was even a small vase of roses. It was like a picnic straight out of a fairytale. She squealed, clapped her hands excitedly and spun around on the spot. Wing watched in amusement as Shelby released the inner girly girl she always kept hidden from the others. Well, maybe not Laura.

Shelby then overbalanced and started to fall after her little twirly moment but a pair of strong arms caught her just before she hit the ground. She smiled giddily as Wing held her close with his chin in her hair. He wouldn't mind just staying here for a while. They sat down and Shelby immediately looked at the food. "Chocolate cake! Triple Chocolate Cake!" she cried out dramatically. "How can I ever repay you?"

Wing smirked. "I can think of one way."

Needless to say, the food was soon forgotten.

**\*\*H.I.V.E.\*\***

"I was so shocked when I saw Ms. Leon. We have a \_cat \_for a teacher? It's so strange," ranted a Spanish accented voice.

"At least you didn't go up and stroke her like some fine eejit," replied Laura Brand, smiling at Nancy Russo. They were in the atrium below their 'cells', sitting down on a couch near the waterfall.

They both laughed, and Nancy's face lit up and she looked happy for once. Her chestnut coloured locks cascaded down her back, refusing to be held back in a French braid. A smile revealed her perfect dentistry and her white teeth contrasted with her dark tan.

"Colonel Francisco scares me. And he just \_had \_to single out me because I am new!" She glared into the near distance, clearly not over it.

"Aye, but the grappler didn't give you any difficulties. You may have had a little hiccup at the start"-

"You mean I made a new friend face-first in the form of a large rock.," retorted the Argentinean, rolling her r's slightly as she relived the embarrassing memory.

"-And apart from the fact that you realised you were scared of heights just when you got to the highest point"-

"And Franz had to rescue me!"

"-You did alright. Just, oh you know, one or two small hiccups." Laura unsuccessfully tried to stifle her laughter.

Nancy put her hands on her hips and scowled at Laura. "Glad to see you think it is funny." Nancy and Laura had been here doing their homework but once it was finished, they had enthusiastically started to gossip about everyone on the island.

"Professor Pike seems â€| slightly scatter-brained? That is the phrase?" She looked at her red-haired friend who nodded. "And Raven is so creepy! Could her hobbies be creeping around in the dark, stalking students for fun and playing with knives? Perhaps she was not hugged enough as a child?"

Laura giggled. "Aye, just don't say that to her face. Unless, of course, you have a death wish."

"Oh!" said Nancy, a mischievous glint in her eyes. Looking around to see could anyone overhear them, she whispered \_"Do you think Nero and Raven are, you know, secretly together?"\_

Laura instantly regretted her poor sense of timing and choked on her gulp of water. Her face reddened and her eyes bulged as she fought to breathe. Nancy continued laughing and helpfully whacked Laura on the shoulder. Which of course made it even worse. Eventually she could

speak properly and made a rude gesture in Nancy's direction. "Can't you tell me things like that when I'm not eating or drinking?" And then she laughed.

After they had eventually calmed down, they noticed a crowd of senior Alphas part near the entrance to the cavern and some familiar faces led by a white-haired figure made their way over to the girls. Just before the boys reached them, Nancy quickly leaned over to whisper in Laura's ear. "You know, he is cute. Nice choice. And you two would be just adorable!"

"Hey guys! Any particular reason why Laura is blushing? Oh look, she's gone all red! Is that even healthy?"

**\*\*H.I.V.E.\*\***

"Oh, Block and Tackle is gone. You can all sit up now," said Franz, looking at the Henchmen leaving the dining hall. He didn't bat an eyelid as Nigel, Adeline, Vivienne, Laura, Nancy and Otto came out from under the table. "Though why six of you was having to hide I don't know." He then looked over at the only ones who didn't hide â€" Shelby, Wing, Stephen and Arthur. "They is overreacting, me thinks."

Shelby laughed. "Yeah. Only slightly."

Otto stood up, wiped imaginary dust from his shoulder and sat down as if nothing had happened. "Just because you people can all blend in with the crowd doesn't mean we can. Laura's hair is like a fire-" "Hey!" "-I have snow white hair that stands out in a crowd of under eighty-fives-" "True" "-And Nigel has no hair at all." "It's genetic!"

Wing took his Blackbox out of his pocket and saw a new message. "It seems Raven will brief us on the Hunt after dinner. Perhaps afterwards we will plan how we intend to survive in the wilderness and evade Raven and her forces."

Arty and the other new students started laughing. "Yeah, nice joke Wing," said Arty as he wiped a tear from his eye. Their laughter soon faded away as they realised Wing was being serious.

"Does someone always die on training exercises?" Nancy ventured tentatively, looking nervous.

Otto exchanged looks with his friends. "Didn't Derek Coriander fall off that glacier on the ninety-three percenter we were meant to go on?"

Shelby nodded. "And a polar bear ate Jodie Wrong. She apparently thought they were adorable! â€|.which didn't stop her from becoming bear chow."

Nancy's face was by now tinged with green. "I regret askingâ€|."

**\*\*H.I.V.E.\*\***

Raven knocked on the door in front of her.



"Enter."

She walked into Nero's quarters, waiting patiently until he had finished scanning a report.

Raven's patience lasted about three seconds.

"I have briefed the third year students on the Hunt. If all preparations go to plan, we are to leave at dawn. The students are under the impression that we are leaving in three days so this will hopefully stop any planning and plotting that your Alpha students in particular are fond of."

Nero leaned back in his chair. "Malpense and his friends could be potential problems. They no doubt plan on passing the twenty-four hour mark."

Raven nodded curtly. "Understood. I have no intention of letting them break the record that's stood for thirty years. But they can try." She smiled impishly. "Anything in particular I should know Max?"

Nero frowned at the reports on his desk. "Diabolus gave me some worrying news earlier. He's lost contact with all the operatives shadowing the former ruling council. They've vanished. Natalya, are you certain no-one else knows the location of the Hunt?"

"Positive. The only people who know are you, me and the advance team who have just left."

The commander of G.L.O.V.E. looked his most trusted ally straight in the eye.

"Be careful. We have lost too many students due to the increasing conflict in the League. After what Malpense alone has been through, we must ensure the majority return to the Island with most bodily functions intact. I advise you catch them as quickly as possible."

Raven smiled coldly.

"My pleasure."

**\*\*Author's Note:\*\***

**\*\*Chapter Four is finished! Yay! Even though it's like been 52 days since I last updatedâ€¦\*\***

**\*\*What? I've been busy and stuff!\*\***

**\*\*This chapter is dedicated to Derek (for being an awesome editor!), Æ•ine (for calling Derek Derek in the first place), SÃ-ne (for being a munchkin and for feeding me), Ruth (for being an awesome \_possum\_ editor!), my mom for making me tea (and sneaking in sugar), the Educational System of this Fine, Fine country (for giving me lots and lots and lots of free time this year) and my brother SeÃ;naghkinsibobskadinsky (for buying me chocolate and inspiring Franz's bad grammer).\*\***

**\*\*The snabge cabbige six (plus like 234) will be going on The Hunt in**

the next chapter! Yay! I can actually hear the joys of delight this time!\*\*

\*\*I expect reviews people! (You know who you areâ€|.)\*\*

\*\*(Yeah, be scared. I know where you live).\*\*

\*\*cairdiuil paiste\*\*

## 5. Monobrows, Howls and Rivers

\*\*Chapter Five\*\*

\*\*Author's Note: 'Lo and Behold, here it is â€" Chapter Five! (cue applause!) â€|maybe I'm over-exaggerating (yeah, \_maybe\_). I know it's been a while since I updated but surprisingly what's meant to be a doss school year for me is actually really time consuming Projects, Work Experience, Musical, etc.\*\*

\*\*I'm so happy with the reviews \_The Hunt\_ has gottenâ€|.17! Thanks to all who reviewed since I last updated: \_I'mTheGirlWhoLearnedToFly\_, Meabh, The Fallen Knight, Shnizel, alicemaybrandonjones \_and\_ Spark \_(and I do know where you live).You guys are awesome possum! But not near as awesome as BlueEminems aka SÃ-neton! She is absolutely dripping in awesomesauce, without her I would have no one to force NCIS on, no one to force manga like The Wallflower on me or visual kei ( she has a thing for Japan) and no one (except Jodie) to dazzle me with her freakin cool hair. She is just the most perfect person everâ€|..and she wrote this dedication to herself! Hi all of deedee's fans!\*\*

\*\*As you can guess, my dedication has been hijacked \*\*

\*\*Fly and alicemaybrandonkones: First; thank you for reviewing and second; the mistakes that were pointed out have now been corrected. God Bless your eagle eyes!\*\*

\*\*Disclaimer: I don't own H.I.V.E., Mark Walden does. I tried to buy it, but I made the mistake of hiring Franz and he embezzled all my millions away â€|.so sad.\*\*

\*\*H.I.V.E.\*\*

Otto sat in the hold of the Shroud, trying to control the butterflies in his stomach. He felt like this before almost every single operation/mission/suicide attempt he'd ever been on. It was always easier when he had no notice of what was going to happen.

Then there was only time to react â€" to ensure the safety of his friends and to thwart whatever villain had Otto's name at the top of his To Do list.

At the start, he had been overly blasÃ© about everything. But as the days and weeks and months trickled by, he realised how truly fragile everyone was. Raven was one of the strongest people he'd ever known â€" but even her experience and skills didn't stop the torture, maiming and general brutality she endured on a daily basis. He supposed it was part of the job description. But every once in a blue moon, he could see the cracks in her ice-cold faÃ§ade. Generally it

was whenever Nero got mauled by the only bear around for 120 miles or whenever Otto and his friends did something stupid. Make that incredibly stupid. Even Laura, generally counted as the only sane one, \*cough\*fat ninjas/thin ninjas/thieves/clones/man-eating plants\*cough\* tried to toast her plate and jam her cornflakes almost everyday.

Not that he ever said anything about it to anyone. Otto would never hear the end of it. Ever.

He had almost told Wing once. He had given Otto a look and clapped him on the back before falling asleep and doing an uncanny imitation of a chain-saw.

Otto straightened and attempted to work out the crick in his neck. It would not do to be distracted given the task at hand. They had been on the Shroud for what seemed like hours, traversing the endless blue of the Pacific (well he was 99% certain H.I.V.E. was in the Pacific Ocean). Unfortunately Nero never seemed to think Otto needed to know the exact co-ordinates of the school. After all he had done. Despicable. But he was rambling again. This was getting to be a habitâ€¦

He looked over at Wing. Somehow, he had managed to fall asleep. Again. Franz was busy drawing a moustache on him in permanent marker. Everyone else was either silently laughing at him or making suggestions on how to deface that work of art.

Otto stretched and poked his head through the hatch to the cockpit. "Are we there yet?"

Raven gave him a look of thinly-veiled disdain. "Exactly like when you asked me ten minutes ago, NO. And again, NO, I will not tell you any more details about the Hunt. Now go back down to the hold like a good boy who won't die prematurely and tell Argentblum that Wing will kill him when he wakes up."

Otto sighed and sat back on his seat. Then he fidgeted. And fidgeted some more. And then advised Franz on how to give Wing the perfect monobrow.

THUNK

An empty can hit Otto on the head. He looked up to see Shelby, Vivienne and Nancy glaring at him. He grinned sheepishly and barely dodged a second missile. He bent down to pick up the cans and the third flying projectile knocked him out cold. Just to make sure he was unconscious, Laura poked him on the nose. And then tugged his cheek like an old woman.

Adeline buried her head in her hands. "When will we get there? I'm bored!"

Laura patted her on the back sympathetically. "Well at least Otto can't annoy us any more. And besides, it shouldn't be that much longer."

The Shroud was then knocked off-course in a rough gust of wind. Arthur dove for a bucket in the back, muttering "â€¦.hate planes I hate planes I hate planes I hate these strange flying invisible

contraptionsâ€| "

Otto fell off his seat and slid from one side to the next as the Shroud rolled. Shelby looked at him and wondered whether he'd have brain damage. She very much hoped so. But then again, it would be at an inconvenient timeâ€|

The Shroud continued to be tossed in the gale-force wind and just as suddenly as it came, it went away. The engines emitted a high-pitched whine and Franz felt the vehicle begin to descend. He looked around at the others. It may have just been the light, but their face's seemed tinged with green. Otto continued to whack his head off the sides of the Shroud. Surprisingly (or rather, un-surprisingly, which ever way you looked at it), everyone was content to let him slide around. Nancy casually lifted her feet so he wouldn't whack into them.

"So," said Franz, looking at his watch. "The record is twenty four hours, I am thought. Who is being the record holder for this Hunt thing?"

Nigel gave him an irritated glare. "Who do you think?"

Franz rubbed his head, embarrassed. An incredibly touchy Nigel was not someone he planned on spending the rest of this death march with. Franz would probably wake up with blue skin and spots everywhere if he annoyed him again. The Darkdoom heir always seemed irritable when anyone alluded to his famous father. Speaking of which-

Franz was then thrown to the other side of the hold and a furious Wing held up the permanent marker. "What did you do to my face?" The German boy squealed in terror as his fellow ninja took slow, deliberate steps towards him. The thick monobrow and pirate's moustache made him look even more terrifying than normal. So did the three beauty spots on his cheek.

The Shroud jerked abruptly to the left and landed without grace or finesse in a snow covered clearing. Raven climbed nimbly out and opened the door to the hold. Otto immediately slid down it and his head whacked against her boot. She gave his (still) unconscious body a dirty look and stepped away to observe the other students disembarking from the other Shrouds that began to re-materialise. Once everyone was assembled before her, she gave everyone an evil glare so they would stop talking.

"We are in a clearing fifty metres from the shore of Lake Baikal. The lake has thawed since the peak of the extreme cold but barely anything else has. Be wary of the frozen rivers and streams. I assure you, I don't plan on diving in after any of you." At this she gave everyone another glare.

"You have one hour of a head start. Off you go."

The crowd moved and low mutterings were heard. They had expected a more dramatic send-off. Raven had been practically pleasant to them.

The famed and feared assassin's scowl deepened. "Do you want me to reduce the hour?"

The third year students yelled in terror and ran in every possible direction away from Raven. Otto groaned from his position on the snow covered forest floor and Wing put a hand underneath his arm to drag him away with the others. Arthur sped over to help when Wing stumbled under his friend's weight. The trio followed their fellow Alphas as they in turn followed Franz underneath the close knit pines.

Suddenly the forest thinned and the lapping waters of Lake Baikal lay before them. Wing and Arthur dragged Otto to the water's edge and dropped him. He recoiled and spluttered. Otto rubbed his head and winced. Wing looked worryingly at the forest. "We must keep moving. Raven and her team will not wait for long."

"Where should we go then? Which direction?" said Stephen, an eyebrow raised.

Vivienne stepped forward into the shallows. "Whichever direction we go, we should walk in the water until we come to a river or stream leading uphill. That way it will be more difficult for Raven to track us."

Laura braved a weak smile. "These boots better be waterproof then!"

The Alphas trudged along the lakeshore and after a while they came upon a frozen river whose route twisted and turned through the mountains soaring above them. They stopped and Otto turned to talk to the others. But before he could, a solitary howl came from the forest behind. Shelby swallowed nervously. A cacophony of howls followed the first and they grew steadily louder. The Alphas froze in fear.

"\_I thought Raven didn't have dogsâ€|\_" whispered Adeline.

Otto frowned. "It seems she does now. Move. We need to cross the river."

Wing shook his head. "It's too wide here. We must go further uphill. And they could be wolves."

As one the Alphas quickly and carefully made their way higher and higher up the mountain. Every so often a terrifying howl came from behind.

Getting closer.

And closer.

Shelby stopped. "It's not going to get any narrower, guys. We need to cross here." She stepped closer the river and put her foot on the ice tentatively. It seemed solid. She took a step. And another step. And slowly made her way to the middle of the frozen river. She looked back to see everyone looking in fear at her. Wing was as white as a sheet. She smiled in encouragement and Laura stepped onto the ice. Not to be outdone, Otto quickly followed and they made their way slowly and carefully towards Shelby. She gestured for them to continue to the other side. Otto did a victory dance once he reached firm ground and Laura gave him a head-slap.

Vivienne slid across the ice and towed the terrified Adeline behind

her. Stephen and Arthur followed silently. Shelby looked at Wing with triumph. "Hurry up slowcoach!" Nancy gave a wail of terror and collapsed onto the ground. She twitched, eyes wide.

Wing bent down to murmur softly in her ear. Nancy pulled herself to her feet, took a deep breath and jumped onto the ice. Wing became her shadow as they slowly walked towards Shelby. The American smiled at the new student and the three began to take stronger steps. It got to the point that Nancy was practically bouncing.

The others were laughing when they heard the first, ominous creak.

Then another.

And another.

"RUN!" The others screamed cries of encouragement, terror and desperation. It did not matter that Raven and her minions could hear them. It did not matter that the howls had increased in ferocity and tempo. The only thing that did was that cracks were appearing in the frozen river. The speed at which they were travelling. The desperation on Nancy's face. The disbelief on Shelby's. The determination on Wing's.

A crack nipped at their heels and Nancy fell behind the faster Wing and Shelby. The crack forked.

Nancy plunged into icy depths of the river.

Wing took a flying leap and landed on the bank. Shelby skidded on the ice and made the mistake of looking back.

Shelby plunged into the icy depths of the river.

"\_Damn it!\_" cursed Wing. He dropped to the ground and began to unlace his boots. "Otto, Nigel, Franz â€" take the others and \_go.\_ Raven and her team will soon be upon us. I will get Shelby and Nancy. Better three get captured early than eleven." He pulled off his right boot.

Otto and Franz gasped. "You â€" you can't!" said Otto. "We â€" We can't!"

Wing paused for a millisecond to glare. "\_It was not a request!\_ \_Go!\_"

Nigel shook his head regretfully. "Wing's right. We should move. Raven will get medical attention to Nancy and Shelby if they need it."

Wing pulled off his second boot. "\_Go!" \_

Laura's last glance before the trees hid her view was of Wing diving into the icy cold waters of the river, boots and gloves laying abandoned on the snow.

**\*\*End of Chapter Five\*\***

**\*\*Author's Note:\*\***

**\*\*But now what shall the Nerd Herd do? Wait for Raven and her minions to come? Wait for other people's minions to come? Crawl into a cave and eat granola bars?\***

**\*\*Sorry I took so long to update \_The Hunt\_. I have been editing my plotline and making it more fiendishly complicated than it already wasâ€|.I will update quicker and more frequently, I promise.\*\***

**\*\*Thanks to my editors for editing and for annoying me into writing chapter five. Otherwise who knows when I would have got it done!\*\***

**\*\*Just one last thingâ€|.hey Fly, Falcon â€" notice the bear mauling part near the start? I put it in just for you guys. There is still hope!\*\***

## 6. Dread, Anger and Snow

**\*\*Chapter Six\*\***

**\*\*Author's Note:\*\***

**\*\*Merry Christmas everybody! \*\***

**\*\*Or "Happy \_ (insert festive holiday)!"\*\***

**\*\*Chapter Six is now complete! Read on at own risk ;)\*\***

**\*\*Quick recap: In the last Chapter, the Alphas finally reached Siberia (after a long and arduous journey, where monobrows were drawn and albinos were knocked unconscious). Raven let the students have an hour of a head start. \_Or did she?\_ The Nerd Herd attempted to cross a river and two Alphas fell in. Wing, being the wonderful and noble person he is, told the others to leave and go on. He would save them! \*\***

**\*\*The Chapter is dedicated to ReadALot, Blue M&Ms and Spoon for their spell-checking. Edit the next chapter soon!\*\***

**\*\*Disclaimer: I do not own H.I.V.E. â€" Mark Walden does. H.I.V. foiled my pathetic attempt to hack into the school's network and wiped my hard drive. Completely.\*\***

Nero shifted through the papers on his desk and finally managed to procure the correct document he needed. Being the Supreme Commander of the Global League of Villainous Enterprise involved a lot of paperwork.

There came a buzz from his Blackbox. Nero flipped it open to see a familiar glowing face. "What is it, H.I.V.?"

"I have the reports from the Hunt, Doctor Nero, as you requested."

A printer from behind Nero's desk churned in response. It then spewed out pages ending with a familiar logo on the front.

Nero commenced looking through the reports and after a while realised

H.I.V. hadn't gone away. "Any particular reason why you're still here?"

H.I.V. seemed to frown slightly. "There appears to be a problem, sir."

Nero froze. For H.I.V. to say anything was wrong was like saying Nero would be given WWII and Armageddon wrapped into a big present tied with a big red bow for Christmas.

"It appears Raven has only captured 16% of the students she has normally caught by this stage. Compared to the other Hunts throughout the years, there's a 43% decrease.

Nero struggled to keep his composure. "And what do you conclude from this, H.I.V.?"

"The third year Alpha students are exceptional compared to others years and have incredible stealth and evasion skills."

"Or someone else is out there and is also capturing students."

**\*\*H.I.V.E.\*\***

Stephen blew on his hands to warm them up as he trudged through the dense snow. He had noticed that Otto and Franz were at the rear of the group, muttering to each other. They were still annoyed at Nigel for making them leave Wingelby and Nancy. Franz still had the battle scars from when Wing attacked him with the permanent marker.

\_Excellent. More problems. That's all we need right now.\_

Stephen stepped out of the forest onto what seemed to have been a meadow before the snow hijacked it. He looked back worryingly at their tracks.

\_All the easier for Raven and her minions to find us\_â€|

Gradually as the mood had changed, they had spread out into a long raggedy line of ones and twos. Nigel and Laura were leading everyone and Nigel kept on looking back at Franz and Otto. Arthur and Adeline were following them at a stately pace and Vivienne was in front of Franz and Otto.

Stephen looked down at the lake itself. He had seen many natural wonders throughout his years but this one was at the top of the list. The enormous abyss extended like a long, deep gash in the Earth's crust filled with water from hundreds of pure rivers and streams, flowing from a rim of lofty mountains, rocky cliffs, and rolling hills.

He would have probably stayed there for hours admiring the scenery but a low noise suddenly caught his attention. He pivoted on his heel and stared into the forest, eyes narrowed.

\_There!\_

A slightly darker shadow moved behind the trees. As he strained his



eyes, Stephen noticed more shadows moving after the first. He looked to the others and shouted the first thing that came into his head.

"BEND THE TREE!"

Otto and Franz froze while Vivienne did as she was told. But she couldn't bend the branch back far enough. Otto rushed to her aid and Franz copied them with another branch.

"FIRE!"

The trio released their ammo and the branches whacked into the shadows. Their cries proved to Stephen that he wasn't a paranoid schizophrenic and there actually had been someone (or two) chasing them around. The black shapes all tumbled and knocked into each other in pain.

Their three assailants legged it towards Stephen and once they reached him he turned to sprint across the meadow. They yelled at Nigel, Laura and Arthur to start running and not to stop.

The Alphas ran steadily uphill, picking their way diagonally across the snow. Stephen adjusted his stride to match up with Vivienne's.

"Do you think that's Raven or the others?" he asked quietly.

"What others?" came a curious tone. "Who else could it be but Raven?"

Vivienne didn't bother to look over at Otto. "Raven â€" no dogs. These twerps â€" dogs. So two groups."

Otto looked as if he wanted to continue interrogating but he didn't want to waste oxygen on a matter that could be resolved later. Everyone's breath became ragged as they kept moving. They all wanted to stop but to do so would have been either suicide or humiliation.

Laura twisted her neck for a second to see behind her. \_"They're gaining on us! Hurry!"\_

They looked around in desperation for somewhere to hide. Franz waved a hand vaguely in the direction of a big rock. Adeline put on a burst of speed and skidded behind it. She screamed and poked her head out.

"It's a cave!"

The remaining Alphas stopped gratefully before her. Franz panted heavily and checked the progress of their stalkers. His eyes widened when he saw approximately ten figures 30-40 metres away. He took a deep breath.

"!"

From above came a soft rumble.

"FRANZ! What are you doing?" screamed Nigel. "This is not a yodelling

competition!"

A light of realisation suddenly came into Laura's eye. She pushed Otto into the cave and he fell with an umph. She then bounded on top of the rock and joined Franz in screaming incredibly loud.

The rumble from above grew steadily louder.

Laura and Franz down and yelled defiantly at their pursuers. They then turned to jump into the safety of the cave.

The sound of the avalanche racing down the mountainside drowned out the screams of Franz and Laura. Nigel and Otto put their hands out for the others to grab.

But before they could the avalanche hit and swept the black-clothed figures, Franz and Laura away down the mountain towards the lake.

**\*\*End of Chapter Six\*\***

**\*\*Author's Note:\*\***

**\*\*End of Chapter six! Where will the remaining group of Alphas go? Where is Raven? And will Franz and Wing manage to get the permanent marker off?\*\***

**\*\*Please review! Any constructive criticism you have, please say so in a review. It would be awesome if you did ;) \*\***

## 7. Memories, Henchmen and a Stream

**\*\*Chapter Seven\*\***

**\*\*Author's Note:\*\***

**'\*\*Tis Chapter Seven! Please read ;) \*\***

**\*\*Khan, Tahir Khan â€" Where have I heard that name before? Well for now he's a SciTech with a Henchman for a bodyguard. Any objections? Oh, and Cole Harrington. He had such a tragic ending in Aftershock that I'll fit him in this story. \*\***

**\*\*This chapter is dedicated to Blondie, spunÃ³g and ReadALot. Send me back the editions sooner!\*\***

**\*\*I finished watching the first season of the English period drama \*\*Downton Abbey\*\* today. And I don't have the second season! \*\*Sniff\*\* \*\*Lady Violet is my hero! (Dame Maggie Smith for those not in the know ; )\*\***

**\*\*Disclaimer: I don't own H.I.V.E. â€" Mark Walden does. I went to an open day at H.I.V.E. once and a big, man-eating plant tried to kill me. I then declined the offer of a place. (Regret #574)\*\***

**\*\*Many Years Before\*\***

The girl was perched uncomfortably on the edge of an armchair. An untouched glass of water lay on the floor. She was cold but didn't

want to take the risk of going closer to the fireplace. She liked living.

There came a soft rustling from the shadows. A young woman passed her to stop by the ornate mantelpiece. She had a small glass of wine in one hand. She turned to the girl, the flickering lights from the fire distorting her features.

Someone knocked on the door behind them and the woman went to open it. She murmured softly with a deeper voice for a few moments and then the other person went away. The girl took the opportunity to examine her injuries.

Nothing was life threatening, at least â€" just enough scrapes and scars to last her until the end of the week. She attempted to peek under the bandage covering her left arm but a slap deterred her efforts.

"Don't expose the wound so soon. It will get infected," said the woman. She straightened and examined the girl â€" well built for her age, with dark hair and a scar across one cheek.

"What is to happen to me?" said the girl. The woman raised an eyebrow in surprise. \_She hadn't spoken a word since Anastasia â€" \_

No. It was too painful to think of now. Too painful to think of the gold locket being examined downstairs. Too painful to think of her best friend in Intensive Care after taking two bullets in the chest. Too painful to think of her only surviving mentor fighting for his life (or maybe close to giving it up) in the Operation Room. All she needed to do was explain to \_her\_ she was joining the League, and then she could go check onâ€"

"You will join G.L.O.V.E. We have decidedâ€" \_those who aren't being operated on, at any rate, \_ "â€"that you will not join H.I.V.E."

"Doctor Nero will not appreciate the deaths of every single student that comes in contact with you. You are too old to enrol without serious tutoring and there is an intense workload in fourth year alone, never mind fifth & sixth. Besides, were you even taught to \_read?\_"

"Only maps in seven different languages."

The woman only gave her a cold smile at her poor attempt at humour. "It does not matter. However, to ensure you are brought up to speed with the rest of the H.I.V.E. graduates, you will be travelling around with three of H.I.V.E.'s former students. Six months with each graduate."

The woman turned to gaze into the fire, watching the tongues of flame battle to break the thick logs to ash. "But just to make things clear, if the either of the other two die, I will kill you. Slowly and painfully."

The girl suppressed a shiver. But it was not from the temperature of the room.

"If Nero dies, I will rip you apart and feed your remains to my

friend's cat."

"You attempt, in any way, to contact \_her\_ allies â€" especially her brother â€" I will kill you."

The girl glared obstinately at the woman. "So I'm going from one prison to another?"

Suddenly the woman moved so that she was right in the girl's face. \_"It is because of you that the Madame is dead!"\_ She hissed. "If it were not for you and your actions, the man I consider a father figure and one of the most dangerous men on the planet, would not be currently operated on to remove three bullets near his heart. He might not even make a full recovery because he knows, somewhere underneath the drug-induced haze, that his beloved wife is dead â€" killed due to the information received from a mere \_child\_ who had tried to \_assassinate him!"\_

The girl bit back the retort that her sixteenth birthday had passed just last month.

The woman struggled to regain her composure. "We leave after the funeral. The entire school will be the guard of honour. A servant will show you to your room."

She turned to leave the room.

"But remember, little Raven, I may forgive, \_but I will never forgetâ€"|"\_"

**\*\*H.I.V.E.\*\***

Otto crawled across the knee deep snow, not even caring that he might encounter a crevasse and be swallowed by the ice. His mind and body were numb.

\_Laura.

—

\_Franz.\_

\_Wing.\_

\_Laura.\_

\_Shelby.\_

\_Laura\_.

\_Laura!\_"

\_All goneâ€"|"\_"

He wasn't even sure if they were still alive. Wing probably was, because he's justâ€"well, Wing. Shelby might be if Wing managed to get her out of the river fast enough. He was afraid to think of Laura and Franz. He and Nigel had tried to head on down after them, but then Nigel had managed to fall in snow up to his neck. The Otto of yesterday would have thought it hilarious, but any urge to laugh vanished the moment the snow shielded that bright red hair from

view.

It had taken all four of them to pull Nigel out. After that, they had all turned to go back into the cave. They huddled there like penguins for a few hours but eventually the group needed water so they ventured out onto the snow, crawling to distribute their body mass. It would be \_inconvenient\_ if they lost anyone else.

Otto stopped, feeling exhausted, and sat down on a large and mossy rock. They were on a small ridge, which overlooked the woods reaching down to the fog shrouding the lake, seemingly miles away. A steep slope rose behind them. "We should set up camp here â€" maybe even sleep in the trees. We'll try and sort out this mess in the morning. If we wake up that is."

Adeline climbed up a tree to survey their surroundings. Arthur and Stephen wandered around, looking for firewood. Nigel inspected the ground, trying to find whether there was anything edible. Futile, of course. Everything was swallowed by snow. Otto just plonked himself onto the ground and stared vacantly at the ground before him.

"We'll find them, Otto. My aunt used to say that the things we lose have a way of coming back to us." Vivienne sat down on the snow next to him.

Otto didn't even bother to hide the tear trickling down his cheek. "Your aunt is a wise woman."

Vivienne shrugged. "She also plays with knives and looks around fifty years younger than she actually is. My other aunt is insane too. She played with fire as a child and has the scars to prove it. But I get by as long as CeeCee and I can raid the Culinary Quarter for cake. Once in a blue moon, the head cook makes chocolate Swiss gateau and it tasted absolutely delicious."

"CeeCee?"

"A friend of mine." The girl bit her lip. "She didn't make itâ€¦|So, um, where did you live before H.I.V.E.?"

Otto felt a pang of homesickness. Though it was more so a regret of loss of power. "An orphanage in London. I was expelled from the local school because I kept on correcting the teachers. I knew the curriculum better than they did. So I stayed home and make the place my own little kingdom."

She laughed. "Nice one."

A cry came from their lookout. Otto leapt to his feet but an arm snaked from behind to choke him. He flailed desperately and collapsed onto the ground when he was suddenly released. He pulled himself to his feet, preserving whatever dignity he had left, to face his attackers. His jaw then dropped in surprise.

"Uh, hey Otto. Uh, Sorry about that. Didn't mean to turn your face purple."

The tall, well built Henchman scratched his head in embarrassment.

"Nâ€|No...N...Noddy?" spluttered Otto. Ptolomy Nodd was one of the few Henchmen who didn't want to kill him. Yet. To solve the problem of being called Ptolomy and having no-one ever pronounce it right, the Greek had worn a yellow and red neck scarf thingy for months and insisted being called El Rouge (he wasn't the best at languages). Unfortunately the name never caught on and he was stuck with Noddy (but at least that was better than Big Ears).

The head of Tahir Khan, a SciTech, poked out cautiously behind the Henchmen's bulk. He smiled broadly when he recognised the Alphas. "Otto! Nigel! You're still alive!"

Otto sniffed in mock contempt. "What made you think otherwise?"

Wisps of strawberry blonde hair blew into Tahir's face. He swatted them away and received a slap for his efforts. Cordelia Erikson, a PoliFi ran up to Stephen. Eyes wide, she said, "\_Food\_?" When the boy shook his head, she gave a wail of despair and slumped to the ground. Tahir poked her foot to make sure she was out.

"She's been like that for hours. No matter how many dogs we run from, no matter how many bears try to eat us, she just goes on and on about being hungry. How could someone so small eat so much and then be hungry again two minutes later?" he said in disbelief.

The students nodded. She was a beast when there was food to be eaten. Last year, at the Annual Underground Mass Consumption Contest, she had beaten Franz by a total of three hotdogs in the American Exhibition. Franz had accepted defeat with grace once Cordelia shared the prize (i.e. indigestion tablets).

"So what happened to you guys?" asked Nigel.

"Once Raven told us to leave, I made my way through a forest with a group of my friends." A tall boy with neatly trimmed brown hair, wearing a grey jumpsuit, strolled out from behind a tree.

\_He was probably waiting to make the biggest possible grand entrance, \_thought Otto, with a mental frown. \_If mental frowns even existâ€|\_

"And you areâ€|?" said Nigel, eyes narrowing. If there was anything he had learned from his eccentric, mostly hairless extended family, it was that the bigger the entrance, the bigger the ego. Like his younger cousin Miles for instance. Little prat.

"Cole Harrington," continued the boy in an American accent. "Political/Financial. No need to ask who \_you\_ two are."

Arty decided there and then that he didn't like him. "You were saying, Herrington?" said the American in an icy tone.

"Well we were wandering through the forest, (my fellow PoliFi's and I). Suddenly Nodd here whacks into Cordelia and she grabbed me to keep her balance. Naturally, we skidded down a hill and get wedged into a hollow in the ground. While we were trying to get out from the rocks, a group of what seemed to be G.L.O.V.E. operatives captured my friends. And it's Harrington, by the way."

" '\_What seemed to be\_' ?" said Adeline, concerned.

"Raven wasn't with them. Which doesn't make sense because there was only one group and Raven would definitely be in it. They just herded them into a group, took pictures of them and ordered them to start walking."

"Couldn't they have run away?" questioned Arthur.

Harrington looked up, his expression sad. "Esmeralda Ruiz tried to. The leader disembowelled her, and then left her there to die."

Otto's face fell. "Sheâ€|?"

Noddy made a face. "By the time we got over to her, she was bleeding too hard to stop. She died less than two minutes later."

There was a moment of silence in respect for the dead student, who had seemed sure to go far.

"Then we were running in the opposite direction when this one-" At this the Henchmen pointed at Tahir "-fell out of a tree above my head. His friends had been taken too."

Tahir then took up the telling of the story. "We ran as fast as we could and had to climb a cliff to get away from the dogs they had. We then had to hide in trees for a few hours. At one point, they had stopped \_right below us.\_"

Harrington looked at the remaining Alphas. "Where's Argentblum? Fanchu and his girlfriend? Not to mention that new student and your red-haired wonder, Malpense?"

Otto then realised he couldn't answer the question without collapsing and bawling his eyes out. Stephen astutely noticed and covered for him. "Wing, Shelby and Nancy fell in a river. Franz and Laura were swept away by an avalanche. There was nothing we could doâ€|"

There was another moment of silence, which seemed to stretch for eternity.

"We should set up camp," said Nigel, taking charge when it became clear Otto wasn't capable of doing so. "We need to get firewood, water and food, if possible. Harrington and Stephen, would you mind getting firewood? Otto, Adeline and Tahir can look for food, or at least check does anyone else have anything. Vivienne, come with me to look for water and Nodd can be the sentry with Arty. Clear?"

The others murmured their assent. Harrington and Stephen disappeared into the forest. Adeline and Otto started constructing snares underneath surrounding trees, hoping a rabbit, or maybe even a hare could be caught.

Tahir tapped Nigel on the shoulder. "There's a small creek just up that hill. We saw it earlier. Looks clean enough." Nigel thanked him and slowly made his way up the steep slope, Vivienne close behind. They fell into an uncomfortable silence as the terrain levelled sharply. The sound of a softly trickling stream beckoned.

"Otto seems pretty cut up about the others," remarked Vivienne quietly.

"Strange experience for him â€" he's almost always had his wingmen for backup." Nigel sighed sadly. He had never really been with them on their adventures. He and Franz had always been made to stay in the safety of H.I.V.E. and foil whatever fiendish scheme had been put into action there. It had always made him feel he had missed out whenever Otto or Shelby joked about it.

The water was cold and refreshing. The Alphas carefully removed the water-skins from their boots and filled them to capacity. The Wraith had nabbed them from the staff quarters in preparation for the Hunt.

Making meaningless small talk, the two slowly returned to the camp. They reached the top of the hill overlooking the others and suddenly Nigel froze.

A group of dark clothed operatives were attacking the H.I.V.E. students. Nodd and Stephen fought valiantly but they had were outnumbered. Otto was dealt a vicious backhand and collapsed (for about the 6,837,182 time that day). Vivienne and Nigel exchanged looks of horror.

The operatives searched the surrounding area and then the leader caught sight of the two remaining Alphas.

Vivienne and Nigel turned on their heels and ran.

**\*\*End of Chapter Seven\*\***

**\*\*Author's Note:\*\***

**\*\*End of Chapter Seven! Please review and tell me what you think! I shall go on the hunt for \_Downton Abbey\_ season two!\*\***

**\*\*cairdiuil paiste\*\***

## 8. Raven, Fingerprints and Opa

**\*\*Chapter Eight\*\***

**\*\*Author's Note:\*\***

**\*\*Short chapter but wait until you read what's ahead. The death scene is \_awesome\_!\*\***

**\*\*This chapter is dedicated to BlueEminems because she buys me oreos and she is God! (DEDICATION HIIACK ALERT)Thank you so much ; )\*\***

**\*\*Quick recap: Several months after the events of \_Zero Hour\_, new students have come to fill up the depleted ranks of H.I.V.E. Otto & Co befriend some of them as they prepare to leave for the Hunt â€" a wilderness exercise in Siberia. They eventually arrive (after Otto is knocked unconscious and Franz and Wing attack each other with permanent markers), but disaster soon strikesâ€|. Shelby and Nancy (a newbie) fall into a river and Wing makes the others go on without him**



as he tries to save them. \_Ah! Nobility! ; )\_ Franz and Laura are swept away in an avalanche of their own creation. Otto, Stephen, Arthur and Adeline are captured along with some PoliFi, SciTech and Henchman students. Nigel and Vivienne are left to be chased by the group that captured their friendsâ€|\*\*

\*\*Disclaimer: I don't own H.I.V.E. â€" Mark Walden does. I unfortunately don't own a super duper secret underground facility hidden in a volcano. I don't get enough pocket money to pay the rentâ€|. \*\*

\*\*H.I.V.E. \*\*

Raven frowned. And crouched down to look at indentations in the snow. Someone had fallen, and subsequently had been dragged away.

The G.L.O.V.E. operatives around her shifted their weight uneasily, giving each other dark looks. This was the sixth site so far. They had all wondered what Raven was capable of (who hadn't?) and knew she would not be above taking out her frustration on them.

Raven stood up. "There were six people here. Two were much lighter than the others. Seven hid out of their line of sightâ€" she pointed to disturbances in the snow behind a number of trees "â€"and were significantly heavier than at least four of the original six. It seems that two fell down this hill," she peered down a steep slope descending into the dense fog "â€"and shortly after that the seven subdued I think four â€" no, three. And thenâ€" she stopped, distracted by a dark red stain on a root protruding through the snow. She carefully sifted through the snow, though for what the operatives didn't know.

She froze. Concealed underneath at least a foot of snow was a congealed pool of blood. A foot or two away was a large blood drop. And then another. And another. Raven followed the trail to the top of the hill. She looked down into the fog, searching for answers which wouldn't come to her.

Raven gave a look to the men and women surrounding her. And pointed to three of them. "You. Check down at the bottom of that hill. Report back as soon as possible."

They gave her a curt nod and filed down the slope.

A crackle came from her radio. \*\*..: \*\*Raven, this is Op324, Beta Team. We followed the trail and found evidence of another altercation with the students.\*\*:..\*\*

Raven fumed in silence. The operatives closest to her face palmed.

"How do you know they were H.I.V.E. students?" barked the Russian.

\*\*..: \*\*A student tore off a lapel from their jumpsuit. There was a muddy fingerprint which we indentified to be Otto Malpense's.\*\*:..\*\*

Rustling from behind indicated the return of the three she had sent away earlier. Raven heard a collective gasps from the men and women

surrounding her.

She turned slowly.

It must be bad if people who had seen and done so much in their careers were to show any emotion. Even worse if they made a sound.

The black clothed figures stopped before Raven. The tallest was flanked on either side by the others. The two held a soaking wet bag and a bloody knife.

But that wasn't the thing that immediately caught Raven's attention.

In the arms of the tallest man rested the body of a young Hispanic girl. Her grey jumpsuit was torn and bloody. Congealing blood surrounded a vicious looking wound in her stomach.

Raven looked at her subordinates in desperation but a curt shake of one's head slaughtered her futile hope.

Esmeralda Ruiz was placed in a body bag and concealed in the upper branches of a tree. Her body would be retrieved once the exercise was over.

Raven withdrew her Blackbox and stared at it. With a sigh she flipped it open.

"Get me Nero."

**\*\*H.I.V.E.\*\***

\_Everything is being white. \_

\_And wet.\_

He tried to blink but it hurt.

\_Snow!\_ \_That's what it was being.\_

\_Why is I surrounded by snow?\_

He wriggled but could hardly move.

\_Being I upside down? I is feeling light-headed.\_

\_The avalanche!\_

The memories all flooded back. Franz struggled to remember the guidelines for when one was buried in snow. He spat and it slid slowly up his cheek. At least now he knew he was upside down.

He flailed his hands and legs around. A foot broke the surface of the snow. He slid out his other foot and slowly, painfully he made his way out into the open air. He lay spread-eagled, gazing up at the starry skies.

So different from the constellations his Opa had taught him so long ago. Had it really been almost four years since he had left his

family? Nigel sometimes talked in his sleep but it was mostly when he had nightmares. Franz didn't like to pry but he had surmised his friend had flashbacks of his father's 'death.' Laura sometimes talked about her family but he knew she found it painful. She and himself were the only ones who had had no existence of G.L.O.V.E. and no thoughts of criminal career.

He took an anxious look at the shoreline mere metres away. They had been so close to falling in the water. Cracks covered the lake as far as he could see.

Wait a second " \_Laura!\_

Franz frantically searched the snow around him but he found nothing. When he had blacked out, she hadn't been too far away

He scrabbled at the ground with fat little paws. Paws that had been exposed to the bitter cold for hours. Paws that had been buried in snow. He ignored the thin rivulets trickling down his fingers from his battered knuckles.

Suddenly Franz noticed a red hair wrapped around the twig. He swept the snow aside, creating a small mountain mirroring those concealing the lake from human settlements.

A whimper caught his attention.

"Laura!"

Franz tugged her out onto the snow and she convulsed. Franz held her hair back as she vomited. Laura lay gasping for breath on the snow. He freaked seeing the icky-smelly-gloopy-stuff-that-somehow-smelled-like-food-but-would-undeniably-taste icky-smelly-gloopy. She eventually calmed down enough to talk to him.

"Franz!" \*huff, gasp,\* "Where are the others?" \*huff, gasp\*

Franz scratched his head in discomfort. "I don't know really. We is swept away by the snow."

Laura cursed violently and punched the snow in frustration. Franz looked away discreetly. Excessive displays of emotion annoyed him. They detracted from the task at hand.

A beam of light shone into Laura's face. It was so bright it hurt. Suddenly she felt a sharp jab to the back of the neck. Then nothing.

Franz remained oblivious to Laura's plight. If only he had a paintbrush to attempt to capture the beauty of this place. Lack of food, snow, possible hypothermia and death aside of course. A hand dropped onto his shoulder.

"You is better now, Laura?"

His shoulder was squeezed.

"That is good. Now we must find the others."

Franz turned in shock to see Laura unconscious on the ground and black suited figures staring back at him. The one with his hand on Fran's shoulder had three small skulls on his lapel.

The commander waved.

Then punched Franz in the face to knock him unconscious.

**\*\*End of Chapter Eight\*\***

**\*\*Author's Note:\*\***

**\*\*What did you think? Exciting enough for you? Now this is the point where everything gets complicated. Next time everyone is together is the death scene!\_ It's going to be deadly! (Bad pun intended. Feel free to send death threats. That bad pun was intended too).\*\***

**\*\*If you were wondering, Opa is a German term for Grandfather. BlueEminems thought it would be cute. It is, however, not to be confused with Oppa, which is Korean for big brother. Wing, Shelby & Nancy will pop up in the next chapter!\*\***

**\*\*Cairdiuil Paiste : )\*\***

**\*\*P.S. Random quote!\*\***

**\*\*\*A pillow may help you sleep for a night,\*\***

**\*\*But it can also help you sleep\*\***

**\_\*\*foreverâ€| "\*\*\_**

**\*\*I intend on making one of the Nerd Herd say it in the futureâ€|\*\***

## 9. Whispers, Automaton and Tobogganing

**\*\*Chapter Nine\*\***

**\*\*Author's Note:\*\***

**\*\*Shelby, Wing & Nancy are back! Yay! They heard your calls and have come back to all of us. \*\***

**\*\*Thanks to \_JasperSaysRelaz 2010\_, \_AndAPartridgeInAPearTree \_and\_ Reensie \_for reviewing since I last updated. You give me hope!\*\***

**\*\*For some reason whenever I write \_H.I.V.\_, it comes up as H.I.V. \*\***

**\*\*Anybody have the same problem?\*\***

**\*\*I dedicate this chapter to Blue Eminems. Check out her profile on tumblr!\*\***

**\*\*Disclaimer: I don't own H.I.V.E. â€ Mark Walden does. I tried to invade by throwing THE CHEESE! But somehow it did not injure themâ€|\*\***

\*\*; \*\*

\*\*H.I.V.E.\*\*

"Incoming transmission from H.I.V.E., sir."

Diabolus Darkdoom looked away from the screens in front of him with a perplexed frown.

"Put the uplink in my office, Munier." He walked quietly through the command centre of the Dreadnought to his office.

What could Max have to tell him now? Diabolus had told his old headmaster he was in the middle of a complex op involving the bankruptcy of several world banks and the crushing of an old friend's organisation.

He had vanished. The H.I.V.E. graduate's villa on Lake Garda was deserted. As well as the townhouse in Zurich, the penthouse in Rio de Janeiro and the castle near St. Petersburg. Diabolus had had him under surveillance around the clock after the last assassination attempt. Somehow he had slipped out from under the net.

But whatever had happened to Blondie would have to wait. He dismissed Saunders's equivalent on the Dreadnought and stared intently into the screen above his desk. The G.L.O.V.E. insignia slowly came into focus and was replaced by the face of Maximillian Nero.

Diabolus leaned back his chair and surveyed his mentor thoughtfully. Nero did likewise and there was silence for a moment.

Nero sighed, and looked much older than his barely-lined face should indicate.

"Max?"

Nero looked his old protégé in the eyes. "The old ruling council are angrier than we thought, Diabolus. They are also in a much better position to cripple the League than we thought possible."

A prickle of unease ran down Darkdoom's spine.

"The students participating in this year's Hunt has been ambushed. And captured by an enemy force."

Diabolus froze.

"Raven has found at least seven bodies and evidence that their companions have been taken. She also found a lapel torn from a black jumpsuit. The fingerprint came back to Otto Malpense. I'm afraid it seems Nigel and his friends have been taken."

"Seems?" said Diabolus slowly.

Nero shuffled through the sheets on his desk. He placed one on top and looked quickly at it to refresh his memory. "I know you're in the middle of an important operation but I need you to help Raven bring the others back to H.I.V.E. And confirm the deaths of others. The Dreadnought would be an excellent command centre. Colonel Francisco

is leaving H.I.V.E. with an assault team now but it will take him a while. You're in St. Petersburg so you're closer than many other G.L.O.V.E. commanders."

Diabolus noted the silent afterthought.

\_You are one of the few that I can trust.\_

It took him just one moment to decide to shelve the entire mission. "Fine. Where is it taking place?"

"Lake Baikal. Siberia."

**\*\*H.I.V.E.\*\***

Shelby collapsed onto the solid ground and threw up noisily. All she cared about was being out of the cold, cold water and being back on wonderful, blessed solid ground. In the corner of her eye, she could see two dark-haired heads break the surface of the water. Shelby crawled over as fast as she could and yanked Wing towards her. Unfortunately Nancy Russo was still with them so she came too and the three collapsed in a heap on the snow. Nancy curled into the foetal position and coughed violently. Wing lunged to the side to throw up.

The American held Wing's long-ish hair back from his face. She had never cared for long hair on boys but it somehow worked on him.

The three then lay back down, trying to control their breathing. Shelby tilted her head to look at her boyfriend. He had never been one to talk so they had created a complex system of movements and facial expressions to communicate silently. They just had to ensure Ottra never found out.

~~Are you ok?~~ she signed.

Wing nodded and tilted his head towards her. ~~I'm fine. But what about you? I was so afraid I'd lose you.~~

Shelby almost sighed. \_If only he actually talked as much in real life.\_ ~~I'll live. We need to keep moving. There's a chance we might get hypothermia. What happened after I went under?~~

She was met with silence.

Finally,

~~I told the others to go on without us. They didn't want to leave but I made them go. I had just dragged the two of you out of the water when I heard someone coming.~~

\_Uh oh.\_ Shelby thought. \_Here comes the guilt-trippin'.\_

~~In order to escape detection, I pulled you and Nancy back into the water. We hid behind an ice floe. A group of perhaps nine appeared. Their dogs then pulled them off in the direction of the others.~~

Wing looked away from her ~~They've probably found the others nowâ€|~

"If you two are done with your private conversations, maybe we should get moving." Wingelby looked up and almost recoiled from the glare Nancy was giving them. She stood up. "I think we might get hypothermia if we don't get shelter, change of clothes and heat soon."

Shelby unwillingly straightened and stretched. "How do you know so much about it? You lived somewhere tropical."

Nancy opened her mouth to reply then froze.

Her hands patted her waist and hips, searching for something that wasn't there.

"Have either of you seen a small pouch, about yea big?" said Nancy casually.

Too casually.

"We were not allowed to bring anything," said Wing slowly.

Nancy let out a wail of despair.

"\_She's going to\_ kill \_me!\_"

Shelby and Wing exchanged perplexed looks.

Suddenly Nancy ran towards the water, screaming and wailing. Shelby and Wing leapt after her and Shelby grabbed hold just before the water.

"I'm NOT going in there again!"

"You're making a mistake!"

"SHE'S GOING TO KILL ME!"

Nancy jumped in but Shelby managed to loop an arm around her neck. Wing stayed on the snow and tried to pull them back in. Nancy scratched Shelby's face in an attempt to get away. Shelby heard a yell from behind but she was too preoccupied to see who it was.

She felt a strong pull from behind and they all fell onto the snow again.

"Thank you," said Wing. Shelby turned, baffled.

Three students in white jumpsuits were talking quietly with her boyfriend. The boy had black hair and the tall girl could have been his twin. The smaller girl had a sling around her right arm and a painful looking wound on her shoulder.

The boy noticed her and smiled apologetically. "Tadhg Bracken O'Brien, SciTech. My sister, AoibhÃ-n and her room-mate Rosie. We heard screams and we came to help."

Shelby nodded vaguely and leaned against Wing. She felt so tired. He instinctively wrapped an arm around her shoulders.

Nancy fumed silently and decided not to tell the others that something was watching them. She didn't know where, she didn't know why, but the shiver down her spine told her they were being watched. \_Now what am I supposed to do?\_

"We should get moving," said Wing. There was something off. Something he didn't trust.

Someone was hiding something.

He immediately ruled out Shelby. Ignoring the screaming mental voice of dissent, he considered the remaining students. He barely knew any of them.

Shelby shifted, agitated. Wing knew she disliked standing around but there was something he had to "â€"

Shelby shrugged off Wing's arm and walked off. Nancy fell into step beside her. The SciTech students looked a bit offended that these students did adhere to the Alpha stereotype.

The tall girl stepped forward. "Wait"â€"

Three bears lunged out of the shadows and pinned the injured girl to the ground. The others screamed as the beast bit her neck. It pounced on the remaining SciTechs and Wing was ashamed to allow the others to drag him with them in their escape.

He stopped and reached for a knife at his waist and cursed when his hands found nothing.

A beast raised its bloody muzzle and growled at him, burgundy eyes sizing him up.

\_Bears are not meant to have red eyes"â€|.\_

Shelby and Nancy stepped behind Wing.

A spasm from a body at the bear's paws caught its attention and what was left of the Nerd Herd wheeled around and fled.

**\*\*H.I.V.E.\*\***

Nigel slipped behind a tree and surveyed the forest before him.

Nothing.

He relaxed and heard a small sigh from behind him. Vivienne sat down on a snow-covered log and winced.

"How's your ankle?" asked Nigel calmly, keeping a watchful eye on their surroundings.

Vivienne made a face. "How do you think? If I hadn't had to practically pull you up that tree in order to hide from the you-know-who's, I wouldn't have fallen and twisted my ankle. Therefore, your fault."



Nigel turned to glare at her. "\_My \_fault? I wasn't the one who had the brilliant idea of throwing a beehive on top of them. I suppose it was your intention to let them realise we were right above them and had no way of escaping. I \_do\_ enjoy being shot at."

"Ha, that last bullet came so close that itâ€"

"Yes, yes, if I had hair, blah de blah, bald patch, blah de blah de blah. I live in the proximity of three extremely annoying juvenile delinquents and have heard every single bald joke known to man and his monkey."

Vivienne was still chortling away when Nigel twisted his neck and popped his eye like a fish. She moved towards him and felt an arm twist around her neck and crush her windpipe. Black spots appeared in her vision and she flailed around, trying to escape the invisible grip of the assassin.

Vivienne collapsed to the ground. A resounding \_thud\_ from behind indicated Nigel had also been released. She looked up and saw three figures appear from mid-air.

One of them stepped forward. "Third year Alpha students? League Agent B340. Your expedition has been uneventful?"

Through a mouthful of blood, Nigel murmured something that sounded suspiciously like "What do you think you ducking glassmoleâ€|"

"Names?" said the G.L.O.V.E. agent, blatantly ignoring the insult.

"Vivienne Beauregard and Nigel Darkdoom," said Vivienne when it was apparent Nigel was incapable of answering.

The other two agents pulled the Alphas to their feet. One allowed Vivienne to lean on her. "Our apologies. Seems we're not the only ones in the woods tonight. Direct orders from Nero said to check since a duo of what seemed to be students slaughtered an entire team of G.L.O.V.E. operatives. We've set up camp in a cave uphill. You need to get that ankle seen to."

The group carefully made their way through the forest and the two wearied Alphas gratefully collapsed into a small cave. An agent checked on Vivienne's ankle while another questioned Nigel on what had happened.

"Here," said B340. "You need to contact Nero." He handed Nigel a Blackbox and the agents filed out of the cavern.

Nigel powered up the Blackbox while Vivienne shifted through the bag left behind by the G.L.O.V.E. agents.

"Find anything interesting?" he called out.

"Two helmets, bandages, two rolled-up sleeping bags, etc." Vivienne looked out of the cave and froze. Two figures in black jumpsuits were creeping up behind the G.L.O.V.E. search squad.

"Make the call. Now."

Nigel glared irritably at the screen until Nero's face faded into view. "Nigel? Is that you?" he said, looking uncharacteristically worried.

"Yes, sir. Is there word on any of the others, sir?"

The look on Nero's face confirmed Nigel's darkest fears.

"\_...wenty-three dead, the rest missing. We don't know if they have been killed or captured by an enemy force. As for the different streams, it seems anyone was targeteâ€|"\_

Nigel felt unsteady and fell to his feet. Were any of the twenty-three dead students he knew? He glanced up at Vivienne to see her stare out of the cave with pure shock.

"â€|\_..Mr. Darkdoom? Did you hear what I just said?"\_

A loud \_snap\_ and a high-pitched scream echoed throughout the forest.

"Doctor Nero, we need to leave. We need to leave \_now.\_"

"At least tell me what happened to the others, Mr. Darkdoom!"

Vivienne quickly stuffed things into the small haversack.

"Wing, Shelby and Nancy Russo fell into a river. Franz and Laura were swept away by an avalanche. Otto and the others were captured by some group. Not G.L.O.V.E."

Nero frowned, even more worried. "G.L.O.V.E. teams are on their way. Your father will be coming in the Dreadnought as well."

Silence reigned outside the cave.

There was a \_crunch\_ of snow.

And another.

Followed by the \_click\_ of a gun, ready to be used.

Despite Nero's shouts of dismay, Nigel slammed down the Blackbox and hid it between a rock and a hard place.

\_Crunch.\_

\_Crunch\_.

Blood stained the formerly perfect snow outside. The bodies of the G.L.O.V.E. operatives lay discarded in a heap, stripped of anything of use. The two boys in black jumpsuits \_crunch\_ed lightly on the snow and made their way to the cave.

In their hands they both held knives.

The taller one was Hispanic, his features fierce and unforgiving. His



Or maybe, just maybe, they had never been loyal at allâ€¦|.

**\*\*End of Chapter Nine.\*\***

**\*\*Author's Note:\*\***

**\*\*The three juvenile delinquents mentioned by Nigel in Scene Three are, of course, Otto, Shelby & Franz. Laura would be far too busy laughing to contribute and Wing would look down on that sort of thing (but be giggling hysterically inside).\*\***

**\*\*The "CHEESE" reference was from the asdf movies on youtube.  
\*\***

**\*\*Mad Scientist: They never said I could teach a lama to drive!\*\***

**\*\*Lama: MAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!\*\***

**\*\*Mad Scientist: No lama! NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!\*\***

**\*\*\*Lama drives off cliffâ€¦|\*\*\***

**\*\*\*Explosion. BIG explosion.\*\*\***

**\*\*Watch them. They're hilarious.\*\***

**\*\*I promise to update soon! Halfway through Chapter Eleven :  
)\*\***

**\*\*Please Review if you have the time!\*\***

**\*\*Cairdiuil Paiste\*\***

## 10. Grammar Disasters and Trains

**\*\*Chapter Ten\*\***

**\*\*Author's Note: Ah, Franz's perspective. A Grammar Nazi's nightmare. Amusing sometimes, incomprehensible at others and once in a blue moon incredibly frustrating. But all the time hilarious.\*\***

**\*\*If anyone at-all-at-all has read this story, you might remember (in a distant, dusty corner in your mind. That is, if minds have corners), that the Fab4 and Co. have been separated, had close encounters with bears, buried under avalanches, had deep meaningful thoughts at completely inappropriate moments, taken hostage by evil ninja's (well â€" evil in this case meaning against Big Blue and the rest of G.L.O.V.E.) and taken delightful midday swims to relax. This chapter will be one of the first in aaages where most of the characters are in the same place.\*\***

**\*\*I apologise for not updating sooner â€" I was caught up with musical, projects, work experience and feeling sorry for myself. But while I was stressing over subject choices, and wishing I could be anywhere else but a small town in the middle of nowhere in a bankrupt country that my children and my children's children will have to pay for for years to come, I somehow realised, at least I have these choices. I have a family, and they're content running around the**

place like maniacs playing this sport and that, finishing college assignments and correcting tests, and speaking a dying language like it's going out of fashion. I still have them, and they still have me.  
\*\*

\*\*This is why I'm dedicating this chapter, not to Blue Eminems, Spoon, Ruth or SÃ-ne, but to the Belgian schoolchildren, their teachers who died in a coach crash on the way home from a ski trip and the children and teachers killed in Newtown, Connecticut, U.S.A. They will never grow up. They won't make subject choices, sit exams, choose their careers. They won't have boyfriends or girlfriends, get married and live to old age, their homes filled with the sound of their grandchildren laughing. Their families will have been torn apart, their lives filled with grief. The world has been robbed of 42 young minds who could have cured breast cancer, stopped deforestation, won the lottery or learned how to brew a proper cup of tea. \*\*

\*\*I am aware that H.I.V.E. is a small fandom, but full of good and bright and amazing people. An even smaller number will perhaps read this story, and might actually read chapters 1-10. But if you are reading this, remember that we all have the potential to do amazing things. Maybe once a month, read fact instead of fiction. Perhaps, study sometimes instead of daydream. You might be human rights activists, good and honest and true politicians (something that's in demand these days), the next Meryl Streep or just a milkman (or woman) who brings smiles to peoples faces everyday. Whatever you have been, are and will be â€" be the very best that you can. \*\*

\*\*At least you have that chance.\*\*

\*\*H.I.V.E.\*\*

Franz yawned and stretched and promptly curled back up in a ball again.

"Franz!" came a hiss. \_"Franz!"\_

Franz ran through fields of daffodils, hand in hand with a girl whose face was eternally shrouded in mystery.

"FRANZ!"

He sat up with a start and banged his head on the low ceiling. He looked around with curiosity. He appeared to be sitting in a cot of some sort â€" no pillow, no blanky. Through the bars of the cot he could see some other bars built into the floor and extending from one wall to the other. Franz gave a nonplussed shrug and hopped outâ€|..

â€|..noticing far too late thatâ€|..

â€|..there was a six foot dropâ€|..

â€|..between his former position and the floor.

He slammed into the harsh, unforgiving concrete. He lay curled up in the foetal position, mewling softly. The pain coursed through his back, whihc had taken the brunt of the fall. A pair of familiar standard combat boots moved into his view. He automatically noticed

the boots were dry and size four. Nigel? Or Otto? They both had small feet. The left started tapping impatiently and without warning kicked him in the Argentblum family jewels.

"Idiot!" growled Laura Brand. "We've been here six hours and all you've done is sleep. I, on the other hand, was dragged by my ankle to the infirmary, strapped down and given stitches for the wound in my head. \_Seventeen\_ stitches, Franz. Without anaesthetic. SEVENTEEN GOD-DAMN STITCHES! And then flung in here and finally finding you (who I had surmised after SIX HOURS AND NO ANSWERS was dead), catching up on your nap-time. YOUR NAP-TIME!"

Franz whimpered.

Laura looked down at the snivelling wreck cowering beside her foot and felt a smidge guilty. She had kind of had experience of almost being blown up and garrotted but Franz usually stayed at home and ate. And then eaten some more.

A door opened along the corridor.

Laura raced to the second set of bars that Franz had seen earlier and peer down the corridor.

\_Where the hell are we?\_

A man in some kind of uniform marched down the corridor and stopped in front of her cell. Withdrawing a key, he unlocked the door and resisted Laura's attempt to escape by delivering a vicious punch. Laura collapsed like a puppet whose strings had been cut.

Franz could hear a stern voice squawking through the guard's walkie-talkie. Synchronised marching could be heard coming their way. Franz closed his eyes tightly to give the illusion he was asleep. Wasn't that hard considering he had had just six hours of sleeps in 36 hours. Not that impressive, but this was Franz. Sleep took the number two spot in his priorities.

Four \_thuds\_ hit the floor of the cell and the marching continued out of the enclosed space and down the corridor.

Franz cracked his eyes open just a sliver.

And then let out a cry of joy.

"OTTO!

"ES HAT SO LANGE! WO BIST DU GEWESEN? WURDE ALS SICHER MEINE TAGE GEMACHT WURDEN! ABER JETZT BIST DU HIER ! WIR SIND GERETTET ! HURRA!"

Otto's face slowly turned purple. "Too-" \*Huff, gasp.\* "â€" tight Franz! Can't â€" breathe," he wheezed.

Franz released him, embarrassed. Adeline, Stephen and Arty looked bemused behind him. Franz could almost hear the H.I.V.E. rumours about his sexual orientation. His dreams of becoming H.I.V.E.'s Sirius Black were doomed.

Laura groaned from her corner. Franz shifted his weight awkwardly as

the others ran to the Scot. There would be hell to pay once Laura realised how many times he had ignored her. Otto turned from examining his kind-of-girlfriend/long-time-crush/fellow-lab-rat-gremlin and gave Franz the evil eye. The German's life was over.

"What happened?" demanded Stephen.

Franz did not appreciate his tone. The newbie had the same expression Nigel generally wore when Franz forgot a project. The one that meant how-dare-you-lower-my-academic-grades/I-will-not-take-your-nonsense/I-had-claimed-that-last cookie.

Laura opened her mouth and coughed violently. Once her coughs subsided, Franz waved away her explanation. This was not a time for words. Words could not describe what he and Laura had been through. There was only one way. One, fail-proof method to convey their actions and emotions.

It was time. For some interpretive dance.

Two women disembarked the train. One had dark hair and an even darker expression. The other was waifish, blonde, idly checking the time as the porter got her luggage. She felt strange being away from her young children. She turned to ask did her friend feel the same but thought better of it. Anyone could be listening.

It was rush hour in King's Cross Station, and people were everywhere. Businessmen in tailored suits strode confidently into the mÃ<sup>3</sup>lÃ©e, harried-looking assistants trailing in their wake. Mothers tugged young children behind them, their young eyes wide with all the people. What must have been a school tour jumped onto the train, teachers trying in vain to keep them quiet.

The taller woman looked at her watch, irritated. The chauffeur should have been here by now. And today, of all days, she had wanted everything to go smoothly. A strand of black hair fell escaped from her bun.

"Ma'am?"

She turned, a scowl on her face. "Yes, Worthing?"

The newest member of the family's staff bobbed his head in a pathetic bow. "The, uh, car's ready now."

The women turned their backs on him in disdain, and walked towards the exit. The woman with her blonde hair cut in a chic bob cursed under her breath. "As if anyone bows to their employer even more. What is this, the seventeenth century?"

Her friend nodded absentmindedly. She fingered her watch, calculating the different time zones to where her significant other was. Or at least where she thought he was. Stock markets these days are such a bore.

She froze.

A familiar shaped object was pressing into her back.

She stiffened and thought of the poisoned knife in her sleeve, the gun in her shoe and the ornamental dagger in her hair. The attacker behind her seemed to read her mind and dug the gun into her spine. A bullet through the C-4 vertebra would at best kill her and at worst leave her paralysed.

"No sudden moves, ma'am. Wouldn't want anything to happen to you," said the chauffeur, a note of triumph in his voice.

The blonde clutched at her friend's arm. "What's going on?"

They all heard the familiar click. The chauffeur continued in an undertone.

"Walk naturally out to the car. If either of you motion to anyone, you're dead. Miss Christine, walk ahead and don't try anything foolish."

"It's Mrs-"

The chauffeur's slightly manic grin silenced her. He rammed the gun further into his captive's back.

The black haired woman continued walking, swallowing the bile that rose up in her throat when the man slung an arm around her.

"Just to make things easier."

Beginner's mistake. Clearly never educated at H.I.V.E. Lt. Morhange would be rolling in his grave.

"How did you do it?" she asked, trying to casually put her hand up her sleeve.

He smiled victoriously. "Too easy. Working for the last family was just an excuse. Your family's security is slipping."

The woman nodded, pretending to be interested. Fingers slid over the blade of the dagger and moved it ever so gently.

"Who hired you?"

"Oh you will find out. But I guess you could you are both acquaintancesâ€|"

Her mind raced. By not using words such as 'you're', 'you'll', etc., he was clearly trying to be clever. But figuring out why psycho she was dealing with now wouldn't help. \_Who\_ could have sent him?

An old woman walked into her, causing a moments confusion. Taking the opportunity, she slid her right hand further up her left sleeve. \_Gently does itâ€|\_

The trio made their way through the crowds. The car was parked in a secluded corner. Away from the crowds, the din lessened. A sidelong glance showed no passerbys.

The dark haired woman spun, and the gun went off. Her friend ducked for cover as shots ricocheted off the walls.



\_Bang!\_

A bullet skinned her cheek. Blood trickled down her neck.

\_Bang!\_

She dropped to the ground and swung out a leg to trip him over. He stumbled and a quick jab broke his nose. He flailed after another jab to the eyes and shot wildly.

\_Bang!\_

\_Bang!\_

A solid jab to the midriff winded her and she dropped to her knees. Her dagger flew like a bird and landed in his jugular. He howled in rage and shoved the Glock in her face.

"You won't shoot," she said confidently. "Because of who I am and who I know, I'm too valuable."

The man leaned in closer, practically sitting on her as he wielded the gun.

"Guess again."

\_Bang.\_

**\*\*Author's Note\*\***

**\*\*Boom! Chapter Number 10! And considering I started this about nine months ago, I'm struck with the reality that I am a procrastinator. Darn. As for the academics, it's back to the grindstone. Picking subjects like History and Geography make free time scarce. Languages are getting better though : )\*\***

**\*\*While all these alternating views may make little sense now, one will (eventually. I hope) understand. They all allow me to focus on different aspects of H.I.V.E. and deepen the story.\*\***

**\*\*Also my German friend is away so until she can correct me, I will have to do with Google Translate. Sorry if (cough, **\*\*\_\*\*when\*\*\_\*\***, cough) you notice the mistakes.\*\***

**\*\*As always, please review. I've been rereading the previous chapters and I think I stopped just short of breaking the law in asking for reviews. I apologise for my blissfully immature and enthusiastic self of one year ago (Note: you may have noticed I use excessive hyperbole).\*\***

**\*\*Thank you for reading to this chapter! And no, this is not the end. I have about four or five chapters left. All depends on editing.\*\***

**\*\*Merry Christmas! Happy Hanukkah! Have some fun this winter : )\*\***

**\*\*Cairdiuil Paiste\*\***

## 11. Threats, Bears and Revelations

**\*\*Chapter Eleven\*\***

**\*\*Author's Note:\*\***

**\*\*School has been fairly stressful (hence lack of updates). Currently (while typing, that is) babysitting at the mo' and I'm cold. And hungry. And finding it very hard not to fall asleep. Could this be the remedy? (I apologise in advance for lines and lines of random characters caused by my forehead when I eventually fall asleep).\*\***

**\*\*It's my birthday! I feel old :)\*\***

**\*\*There's a cookie for anyone who catches the Harry Potter reference. Here's the eleventh chappie!\*\***

The trio of faces stared at him.

They were all pixelated of course, so he couldn't make out any details. But that didn't matter. Valentin had heard enough tales of their exploits to know that if he stepped over the line-

"Obolensky?"

He focused his attention back on the screen, "All is proceeding to plan. We have captured over 80% of the targets."

The woman in the centre seemed to frown. "Exact percentage?"

"81.5," he bluffed.

Valentin tried to stay impassive but couldn't stop the shiver running down his spine.

All three faces tilted their heads to the side, eerily in sync. Did they practise this? The command of the Renaissance Initiative knew everything about him but he knew nothing about them. All he did know was that on the day Nero ousted him from the council, they contacted him. Commanded him to move to Siberia. Gave him information on the Hunt. Told him who to target. Gave him every last detail and resource he would need.

The truth was he was bankrupt. He could barely keep afloat each month. His grandmother's emerald necklace was sold to pay off the Mafia. His uncle's gold watch to pay the monthly G.L.O.V.E. settlement. His mother's prize Fabergé egg to keep up appearances. His permanent residency in the red was no doubt a key reason why he was chosenâ€|

Business had been going well until about a year or so after the Initiative was founded.

Valentin's elevation to the council had demanded better suits, more expensive cars, a new house on the continent and a complete renovation of the Paris apartment. He had even tried to tread old waters, finding out after several declined invitations to the opera

or theatre that the water was stagnant.

Then a successful bank robbery (hey! It may be old fashioned but it's still done for a reason!) was raided while the goods were being stored at a warehouse. Doctored reports at an oil rig had led Valentin to believe the reserves were empty. He eventually found out (thanks to the Initiative) that the oil was being siphoned off out of sight of the rig. A thief stole all of his paintings from the Paris apartment. He had had to get fakes (very expensive fakes).

So when the Initiative had come knocking he had thought: why not, and convinced himself that he could walk out of such an agreement whenever he wanted to.

\_Fool.\_

After what seemed an eternity, the woman in the centre addressed him again.

"This isn't enough. We want to see results."

A beat of sweat inched down Valentin's spine.

"I can send more reports-"

The man to the left slammed his fist down. "Emphasis on \_see\_, Obolensky. Have you even caught the B-Specials yet?"

"Most-"

It was amazing how even a pixelated face could make Valentin want to cry for his mother.

The woman in the centre seemed to become somehow \_denser\_ and more threatening.

"This is not acceptable. I will personally come to oversee your operation. I will reach Siberia by dawn. Do not fail us a second time."

Running off to Tibet and becoming a monk had never seemed so appealing.

"Yes, Madame."

\* \* \*

><p>Nigel Darkdoom trudged through the snow, trying to remember the last time he had felt so vulnerable and weak.<p>

Perhaps at age six when his uncle left him in a forest and told him to make his own way out. \_"Time you learned to carry the family mantle, boy."\_

Or maybe when his mother grasped his shoulder tight enough to draw blood at his father's 'funeral.' Of the many that had turned up to pay their respects, there were those who kissed his mother's cheek, gave unfeeling condolences and silently judged him. He had almost heard them say \_"You'd think with parents like thatâ€¦!"\_

No, no, it was probably now.

As he slowly made his way through the thick snow, he could clearly understand the vibes his companion was emitting.

Nigel and Vivienne had made their way through the forest, occasionally wading through streams to throw the dogs off the scent. They had heard wolf howls to the south and had just climbed a tree when a pack burst through the undergrowth and stopped right under the tree.

Their yellow eyes had seemed to look straight through him, seeing his fear and pain.

A scream from the west had caught their attention and they slinked away into the darkness, ears pricked in anticipation. Fifteen minutes later the screams were replaced by howls.

Using the meagre supplies in the bag, they had spent the night in the tree, trying not to freeze.

"Any ideas?"

He scowled at the snow. "Since the last time you asked, no. Have you any plan?"

Vivienne mirrored his expression. "No."

\_Scratch.\_

They both wheeled around, back to back. "What was that?" the girl whispered.

\_Scratch.\_

The knife felt strange in his sweat-slicked palm. "Maybe it's an animal."

\_Scratch.\_ \_Scratch.\_

The Alphas slowly moved to the roots of a huge pine, the topmost burned by frost.

"It's a bear!" said Vivienne, visibly relaxing. "Thought it was a G.L.O.V.E. operative."

The grizzly bear cub peered up at them, baring his teeth. It seemed to be caught in a plastic net. Nigel sighed and began sawing at it with his knife. "After all we've seen, you're worried about Raven?" The bear watched him warily.

She shrugged, nonchalant.

Equally wary of the bear's teeth, Nigel gave one final slash to the plastic and the bear was free.

His companion smirked. "Considering changing professions?"

He ignored her (the same way he would tune out Franz's "If you will being come with me to the kitchens, I would do your homework, ja?" (a

lie) or Otto's general chatter). If there was anything his (sometimes) monotonous and (otherwise) disappointing childhood had taught him, it was that trust is earned. Suspect everyone. Therefore he didn't trust Vivienne Beauregard at all. As one who spent (most of) his time being silent, he had come to notice the other silent ones. The ones who would not tune out everything and everyone but instead watch and learn.

Vivienne had done nothing but watch since she came to H.I.V.E.

He had noticed.

She turned to look at him and he got that unsettling feeling again. That he'd seen her before.

"Where will we go now?"

Nigel sighed. "Well it's not as if we have a plan, do we?"

They walked in silence through the woods, side by side. "Any water left?" The empty waterskin that he threw at her answered that. More sounds from behind caused him to turn around. And scowl. For a second he had thought there had been something else—|as in more than one person something else.

"The bear's following us."

Vivienne also used the 43 facial muscles necessary to frown. "Well done, genius. whose fault do you think that is?"

The bear (who Nigel had decided to call Otis) suddenly put on a burst of speed and snatched the waterskin from Vivienne's grasp. Which then resulted in Otis being chased for his prize.

Trees were run past, logs vaulted over until finally Otis stopped on the edge of a cliff, looking so cute and cuddly that butter-couldn't-melt-in-his-mouth. There was a slight noise behind them but Nigel focused his attention on the water skin.

"\_If y'all don't find water, you gonna die!\_" Colonel Francisco would have been proud that something sank in.

"What do we do?" Nigel whispered.

"Give it food?" Vivienne countered.

Nigel rolled his eyes. "We don't have any—"

Vivienne pulled some smoked beef out of a packet.

"Please tell me you're not going to—"

Otis relinquished the waterskin as he munched happily on the meat. Nigel gave Vivienne his Franz-why-did-you-copy-my-homework-and-get-me-detention-again look. \_"Thanks,"\_ he muttered sarcastically. "Have you anymore food?"

The look on her face stopped him. He turned slowly, staring at the 550 pound, seven foot tall grizzly bear.

All four heads turn to the group of white clothed individuals that then stepped out of the forest. Nigel didn't know what was worse: their bad timing, the fact that they might be the cavalry or their imminent death at the paws of Mamma Otis.

The bear growled.

The possible salvation squad removed the safety lock from their guns. Maybe they were not friendly.

Vivienne looked at Nigel.

Nigel looked at Vivienne.

Otis continued to gnaw at the beef jerky.

Then he looked up at Nigel for more. "I is dying here," \_his Franz-esque eyes seemed to say.

Then everything seemed to blur together.

One of their would-be kidnappers seemed to think that Otis was a danger and shot him. Mamma Otis howled and pounced on his unfortunate colleagues. One broke free of the scuffle, blood trickling down his chest. Nigel stepped back to find nothing.

Only air.

He sailed through the air, crashing through the churning river water beneath and Vivienne whacked him on the head, trying to put on a helmet from the bag.

He blacked out to the howl of a bear cub, the snarls of its mother and the high pitched screams.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Throb.<em>

\_Throb. Throb.\_

\_Throb Throb Throb.\_

Laura groaned slightly and Otto gave her a sympathetic look. Her head was killing her.

As was the behaviour of whichever supervillain/wise-ass/narcissist that had attacked them this time.

The H.I.V.E. students had been left in the holding cells for hours and had been unceremoniously dragged out at dawn (or what she thought had been dawn) and dumped in a grandiose briefing room. With plush chairs and salted beef jerky. Franz was out for the count, sprawled on the table, snoring loudly.

She envied his child-like ease at sleeping. Laura herself had spent the night leaning on Otto and poking him repeatedly whenever he snored (which was often). Her Romantic notion of love had been well and truly quashed.

The new students seemed none the worse for the wear. Adeline Yen Li was gazing around with fear and looked as bone-weary as she had the night before. Her American companion had been complaining loudly about the lack of food and how tired he was and how his father would hear about this.

Laura's sole British companion (she wasn't certain about Otto anymore) was the only one looking refreshed and ready for whatever the world might throw at him. Stephen was so ready that he threw beef jerky into Arthur's open mouth to stop him from talking.

The subsequent Heimlich manoeuvre was worth it.

\_Throb\_ went her head as the doors were flung open and a tall, well built blond man swaggered in.

"Welcome students! It's always a pleasure to meet alumni and current students alike from my alma mater. You lot weren't as sloppy in my day! Nero's brain-washing prison must have fallen in standard."

His smile faltered slightly when he noticed how unfazed his audience was.

"Well whoop-de-do," said Otto. "As to that little speech, I give exactly zero f-"

The knife hurtled past his temple. Maybe he would broadcast his indifference another day.

The blond glared. "My name is Valentin Obolensky and personally, I have nothing against you all. You are all merely the means to an end." He smirked and flexed his knuckles threateningly.

Franz snored.

"Oh why don't you just get it over with," drawled Stephen, "put them out of their misery."

Laura and Otto exchanged looks as a shiver ran down her spine.

Obolensky smirked and walked behind the Brit's chair. "Ever wonder how I found you all?"

Franz dove towards the knife behind Otto and waved it threateningly at the blond. "You. I knew it was being you. You was too slimy and slippery from the start, ja?"

Laura's head was ringing, but whether it was from the head wound or the revelation she couldn't tell.

The Russian nodded and a red dot appeared on the H.I.V.E. student's forehead. "Sit down, boy. I'd heard your wits were slow but really, are you as dull witted as your father says?"

A vein pulsed in Franz's temple and he dropped his knife. "You is lying."

Metal shackles rose out of the chairs and entrapped the students' wrists. Obolensky motioned to Franz to sit down and his armrests did

the same.

Stephen's smirk grew louder. "Apparently he tells the same story of your confusion between chocolate and human faeces all the time. I read it in your file."

Franz's bewilderment was mirrored on his comrades' faces. "File?" he questioned.

Obolensky proudly ruffled Stephen's hair. "My nephew and his companions were given every bit of information we could find on you all. He used it to send a series of encrypted messages from the Island which told us all we needed to know about the location of the Hunt, the security detail, and even the names of each and every student coming here."

Laura's stomach tightened.

\_Throb.\_

\_Throb.\_

Otto shook his head in disbelief. "Wait, companions? You had more spies?"

Stephen smirked. "Oh yes, you moron, I couldn't possibly have pulled it off on my own. Of course I had help. We all had to be rather stealthy."

Adeline jumped as Franz slammed his fist onto the table in anger.

Otto glared at the Brit. "You mean I spent that long helping you settle in for nothing? That you used us all to attack Nero?"

Obolensky looked livid. "He deposed me from the ruling council even though I went to his cult of a school. The others, his \_favourites\_ who had been my classmates, were kept while I was culled along with the wretches who had little to do with his precious Island. I already said you were means to an end."

Arthur cradled his head in his arms. "I thought I could trust you, man! You've ruined everything."

Franz slammed down his fist again. "So you be thinking that ze student can suppress the master, ja?"

"Franz I think you mean surpass-"

"You is ruining my speech Arty. But no! Silent Death lives on and he shall destroy you!"

The Russian tapped his nephew on the shoulder. "As fascinating as your diatribes are, we must get going. A few of your friends are out there and I intend to find them before the bears do."

As they neared the door, Stephen turned to give a parting shot.

"Do any of you know \_how\_ got the information on the Hunt?"



Otto scowled. "Oh please, put us out of our misery."

The Brit paused and his smirk grew.

"Ask your girlfriend, Malpense."

**\*\*Author's Note\*\***

â€|**\*\*and that's just the first.\*\***

**\*\*See y'all.\*\***

**\*\*Cairdiuil Paiste\*\***

## 12. Bald People, the Weather and Commlinks

**\*\*Chapter Twelve\*\***

**\*\*Author's Note:\*\***

**\*\*Just one big P.o.V. for this chappie. Have fun!\*\***

The Shroud glided over the lake, flanked by two more.

Inside, Diabolus Darkdoom checked his equipment, tightened his boots, and gave a last appraising look over his companions. Raven was also checking her equipment and the rest of his team stood ready to go.

Ready to die.

For G.L.O.V.E.

For his family.

For him.

The pilot turned to give Diabolus a nod and in turn Diabolus gave a nod to his troops. He grabbed a commlink. "Shroud 2 will make its way to the southern shore. Shroud 3 to the east and Shroud 1 to the last known location of the H.I.V.E. students."

\_Of my son.\_

He paused and the visors of his companions' helmets reflected back his face to him. Raven looked at him coolly. A hint of resentment at not being on point?

"Thermal scanners will be issued to each operative in order to ensure we retrieve the students. Be silent, be wary and other than retrieving students, do not make your presence felt. The batteries in the suits are weak so use them sparingly. Raven's team on the ground will meet up with Shroud 1 and then the Shroud will scan the area and be in the air."

Diabolus watched in silence as the ground rushed up to meet the Shroud on the right. With a jolt, they landed on the snow, the hatch and the back whirring open. The disciplined squad filed out and ran

for the woods.

The other Shroud veered to the left, leaving the centre Shroud on its own.

He watched Raven out of the corner of his eye. They had met up with her some 30km south of the lake. Reception had completely gone so in order to communicate with G.L.O.V.E., she had had to leave the reserve.

The ruling council had voted unanimously to give Diabolus the lead.

Still too young, they said. Flawed plan from the outset, they said.

\_Didn't go to H.I.V.E.\_ is what they really meant.

Diabolus was all for change (when it suited him) but this was excessive. The (new) ruling council had all gone to G.L.O.V.E. and was a healthy mix of most of the streams. Precedence had (obviously) been given to the Alpha stream but there were a few advisors for science and politics. Influence and effect of schemes and so on. Though why there were not one but two former Henchmen he could not fathom (really? Two? It's not as if they were streamed by intelligenceâ€¦).

He knew his wife would be disappointed in their peers. Raven had (almost from the beginning) been a firm favourite of hers and together were a formidable bridge team. Absolutely formidable.

All this precedence for H.I.V.E. graduates would be all good and well in thirty of forty years from now, when the H.I.V.E./diamonds in the rough ratio would be comfortably favouring the graduates. But now all this seemed to do was incite the average G.L.O.V.E. employee, one who worked their way through life and then catching the eye of G.L.O.V.E. after a notable success. They viewed H.I.V.E. grads as unfairly favoured, spoilt and soft.

Cooperation as a result within G.L.O.V.E. was becoming increasingly difficult. Diabolus knew he was lucky, years on the G.L.O.V.E. dinner party circuit granting him invaluable contacts. Not to mention the family links from his own and the in-laws.

This growing rift left Raven and others as unfortunate casualties. She was lucky, of course. Only her pride seemed wounded. There would be worse.

"Sir, we're almost here," said the pilot. Diabolus gave him a nod and flexed his right hand. Old wounds never go away completely.

He gave the troops a nod and grabbed a handhold as the Shroud landed. And rather gracefully at that. He'd had worse.

The hatch opened and the operatives at the back filed out. Diabolus smiled at Raven. "Ladies first."

She rolled her eyes and fell into step with him as they walked out onto the crisp white snow. Raven's team had been waiting for them and nodded at his own then falling into line, facing their

leaders.

"Right!" he said, clasping his hands as the Shroud disappeared from sight. "We have enough present that if we find tracks, groups of three will be sent off. Raven, seven others and myself will head for the last known location of the students. You all know what to do."

The group headed into the forest, finding tracks within five minutes. An owl hooted from above.

One man squatted down with Raven and Diabolus to examine them. A former big game hunter, this man specialised in hunting down primates. "'Bout six hours or so old, sir."

Diabolus nodded at three operatives and the main group continued on. Up past a narrow creek, they found their second. With brown stained snow in a bush. "Dehydration, sir. Them kids have been out here for a while."

After two hours, only the skeleton crew of Raven, his own seven subordinates from home and himself remained. The last set of tracks had droplets of blood following them.

He turned to Raven at his side. "What do you think of their chances?"

She took a quick look at those behind them. "At the moment, not so good. It's colder than forecast, looks like bears and other carnivores have been hunting and the students have had little experience of these conditions."

Her only reply was a raised eyebrow.

\_You know who I meant.\_

The assassin paused to yank her boot from a snowdrift, trying to hide a smile. "Malpense and some of the others have had some experience of running and hiding. Nigel and Argentblum mostly stayed in the rear."

Diabolus fought to keep his face clear. One did not show weakness in front of his subordinates.

Inside he was panicking.

He was not a man to double-guess himself. Yet he seemed to doing that constantly recently. About his son, his parenting (or lack of), his marriage, his brothers, his former best friend "â€"

"We're here, sir."

The cave from which the radio signal had come from was empty. But naturally he had expected that. There was a smear of blood on a rock and "â€"

A ring.

His family crest.

His son had been here.

One of the operatives came to give a report. "Sir, we've searched the caves. The only way out is through the entrance. The area to the north is steep and with little cover. Thermal imaging showed no trace, sans the odd animal. The west is the lake and the south is where we came from."

Diabolus considered the woman's words. The chance for survival seemed to be getting lower and lower.

"And the east, Dupont?" Raven had finished looking over the back wall of the cave, searching for more passages.

The woman hesitated, her French accent becoming more pronounced.

"A ravine, sir and ma'am, and the others 'eard 'owls."

Her commander seemed to regretfully sigh. "Pity that they still have to search it." He nodded at the group outside the cave and four headed with the Frenchwoman into the thickening mist.

"I don't like this mist," said Raven. "It will be even more difficult to search this place."

Her companion nodded in agreement. "Mist was thicker back in the day for my Hunt."

She looked over in interest. "Really? Where were you?"

The remaining three operatives began rubbing their hands together following an icy-cold gust of wind.

"South-east Asia. High summer meant constant humidity and blankets of hot steam from the volcanoes." He did a stretch to loosen the knots in his leg. "At least we assumed they were volcanoes. Didn't exactly want to check."

Raven gave a non-plussed shrug. "And your time before capture?"

At this, the bald-headed man smirked widely. "Twenty-four hours, three minutes and forty-seven seconds. The students have yet to beat my record."

The Russian quickly hid her surprise and mirrored his expression. "When students hear of that record, most die a little inside. Others like to pretend they can beat it. Their hopes die eventually."

Diabolus gave a chuckle and surveyed what he could through the mist. A cold gust of wind revealed the ice-locked waters of the lake. This time of year was dangerous, with the ice growing more precariously thin.

He looked at his commlink, worried at the amount of time with no contact from the group in the ravine. He nodded at Raven and she followed him towards the two remaining men. The group made their way into the mist, watching everything and saying nothing.

A piercing howl to the south sent a shiver down Diabolus' spine.

The group's boots crunched softly in the snow, all the heads moving slowly to survey the landscape. A tree loomed out of the growing darkness, tall and snow-laden. The foursome jumped (in Diabolus and Raven's case, not so noticeably) when a clump of snow fell off the tree.

Behind another tree they saw a boot.

They all froze, Raven withdrawing her Sleeper.

A dark shadow fell towards them and Raven used her impressive zapping skills to zap it (didn't make much difference because it was unconscious anyway). Diabolus realised a second too late that the real danger was from behind "

He was thrown back when an unknown assailant tackled him and attempted to stab him in the eye. They grappled in the snow, each trying to overcome the other. He twisted the attackers arm back unnaturally and kneed the assailant in a sensitive place.

As the attacker writhed in agony, Diabolus calmly stood up and pointed his gun at the figure. He turned off the safety switch.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Raven helping a figure to their feet. Another one was leaning against a tree trunk, catching their breath. Both figures were smaller and less built than his own operatives.

\_Wait a minute"\_|\_

Diabolus turned back to his assailant, who suddenly looked rather familiar"

The boy on the ground turned to glare at him.

Diabolus turned back on the safety switch and smirked.

"Well, I never thought I'd see the day. That a student of Doctor Maximillian Nero would degrade themselves like this.

"I didn't think you would ink so low to be mauled by a permanent marker, Wing."

He chuckled as Raven gave him a pained look. He could almost hear the that-was-so-punny retort that she was so clearly dying to keep silent.

Still chuckling, Diabolus extended a hand to the Alpha, pulling him to his feet. His thank-you was a vicious glare.

Nigel's peers were clearly too young to pass the passive-aggressive attitude towards their superiors stage yet.

That would soon change. More of his own subordinates stumbled into the light, also wearing vicious glares (albeit hiding them better than the teenager).

Shelby Trinity and a Hispanic girl were standing by Raven's side,

with the Hispanic girl rubbing her hands together in an effort to keep warm. The American looked relieved to have been found and was shivering next to Raven, telling her about the others.

"We split up when Nancy and I fell into the water. The others went on. Wait â€" No, I don't know where the others are â€" They went on ahead. â€" I mean, I â€" we were so cold and I just haven't felt warm for \_so long\_."

The girl seemed slightly tearful and smiled gratefully at her boyfriend when he slid an arm around her shaking shoulders. Ah, young love in all its idealistic glory. Where just a touch could make everything better.

Diabolus had discarded such ideals long ago.

"Regardless," smiling gently at the students, "we need to move on. As soon as we make contact with a Shroud we'll have you whisked away."

Fanchu looked at him stubbornly. "I'm not leaving without Otto and the others. And I know you aren't eitherâ€|sir."

\_Cheek.\_ Or loyalty.

The gentle smile changed to a condescending I-know-what's-best-for-you frown. "Unfortunately for that noble notion, you all will more than likely get hypothermia if you stay here too long. You fell in a river and are half starved for God's Sake."

Fanchu looked ready to argue but a G.L.O.V.E. employee interrupted. Dupont was slightly worse for wear from her scuffle with Wing and had a congealing cut on her forehead. "Sir, you have to see this."

She thrust a commlink into his hands.

Diabolus frowned. "This is a Drake Industries communicator. It's from a disused line."

Trinity sniffed. "Are you sure, sir?"

The G.L.O.V.E. commander raised an eyebrow, affronted. "Yes, of course I'm sure. I now own the Industry and discontinued this model myself. Where did you find it, Dupont?"

She looked anxious. "Behind the tree, sir."

Raven and Diabolus shared a worried look and turned to glare at the students.

The Hispanic girl, Nancy, smirked.

\_A smirk of victory.\_

Far too late, all the G.L.O.V.E. employees reached for their guns only to be stopped suddenly.

By a red dot appearing on their leader's forehead.

Valentin Obolensky walked out of the mist, clapping mockingly.

"I thought you would be more challenging to capture than that, \_old friend.\_"

**\*\*Author's note:\*\***

**\*\*C'est fini : )\*\***

**\*\*Not entirely, of course, but there aren't that many chapters left. I promise I will finish this fanfic before the end of the summer but I have exams (fun times! Not.) and a language course to deal with before I can touch the computer again.\*\***

â€|**\*\*You know the drill by nowâ€|\*\***

**\*\*Bonne Nuit (I'm in a French mood. Hopefully I didn't spell that wrongâ€|)\*\***

**\*\*Cairdiuil Paiste\*\***

### 13. Sleepiness, Hearths and Tracking Devices

**\*\*Chapter Thirteen\*\***

**\*\*Author's Note:\*\***

**\*\*Hello! Here's the thirteenth chapter!\*\***

**\*\*My typo of the days seems to be 'friend.' Keep on typing 'fried.' A signâ€|?\*\*\***

**\*\*A big thank you to AlphaFive. Darlin', you've been my sole reviewer for the last three/four (who truly knows?) chapters. You made my day(s) :)\*\***

**\*\*And of course something I've forgotten to do for at least three or four chapters â€" I don't own. Nada. Do I look as if I'm wealthy enough? (lol. Like you can all see me. Or can you?\*\*\* \*Turning off the webcam.\*)**

Nigel wearily climbed out of the water, exhausted.

Vivienne sat next to him, (attempting to) drain the water out of her shoes. No use trying to be stealthy, dear. The enemy shall hear you squelching miles away.

"Did you hit your head?" Vivienne said while pulling an eel(?)/worm(?)/radioactive snail(?) from her boot. "That's all we need."

Nigel rolled his eyes. "Yet again, I am surrounded by people who care little for their companions." He examined the cracked visor of his helmet. "Most people ask about others' well-being in at least a vague, disinterested voice."

Oh look, stony silence. Lovely social skills.

Absolutely drained of energy, the pair made their way up the slope,

further into the cave and further away from the gushing stream below. Nigel hit his head off the low ceiling and his companion snorted in amusement.

They had been drifting in the water for what seemed like hours, all the while underground and in complete darkness. Nigel had been afraid that the earth would swallow them up. That they would never see the sun (which meant no plants. Sniff).

The Alphas crept behind a stalactite to find a remotely dry patch.

"We should rest here," said Nigel, struggling to stay awake.

Vivienne was already asleep.

\* \* \*

><p>The girl crept down the corridor, her heart beating loudly.<p>

So loudly, in fact, that she was worried They would know she was there. Her boot-clad feet stepped softly onto the luxurious red carpet. Old paintings of by-gone days and by-gone people looked impassively at her.

\_Intruder,\_

their eyes seemed to say, burning with the flickering fire in the hearth. A magnificent floral arrangement was displayed proudly on a table. Thick, expensive-looking curtains framed the chalet's arched windows. The girl hadn't seen much in her fifteen years but she knew enough to realise that this wasn't just a safehouse, somewhere for its occupants to hide away from the world.

This was a home.

She paused by the fireplace, the grand marble staircase to her right. The inaccuracies with the plans she had been given were grating on her nerves. The 'secret passageway' that was to lead her behind all the bedrooms was inaccessible. Now she had to creep around in plain sight.

Hearing noises, she panicked, falling through the nearest door she could find. A lovely, comfortable broom closet. She pressed her eye to the cobweb-infested keyhole to glimpse two young men walking confidently down towards her.

One was tanned and had a less-built frame than his companion. His glasses reflected the light of the fire, unruly and ferocious. A big travelling bag was firmly in his grasp.

His companion seemed to be enthusiastically explaining some nefarious scheme, grinning wildly at his friend's response.

They pair walked straight past the girl and paused at the winding staircase, oblivious to her presence. "â€|and then he turns to me: You seem to 'ave caught me at a disadvantage, my friend."



They both roared with laughter. The man with the broad shoulders continued. "So I obviously threw a towel at him and dragged him out the window-" The friend sniggered. "Oh you must have been \_so\_ disappointed, Big-Headed Boy." In reply he was shouldered into the wall.

"That was once," snarled the story-teller, a hint of a smile in his voice. "That was just the one time I didn't look at my badge before putting it onto my jumpsuit. Then naturally I couldn't understand why herself and Nero were failing to keep to keep their composure during the Heads Meeting."

The Hispanic man stopped laughing. "Soâ€|how's that going?"

The black-haired girl was confused. Heads? Jumpsuits? Disadvantages? She had been told that the outside world was strange but her (brief) briefing had never prepared her for this.

The second man clearly knew about what he was talking. In a more sombre tone, he avoided the question. His friend nodded slowly. "When I saw Val in Prague, he seemed awfully keen on the jewellersâ€|" His companion's face darkened.

The second man put on a smile and clapped his friend on the back. "Safe journey, old chap. Ever since Nero tangled with that Russian fellow, people have been disappearing left, right and centre."

The Hispanic man gave him a man-hug and paused before heading down the stairs. "You should talk to her."

The bald-headed man watched him leave in silence.

\* \* \*

><p>The girl started to feel a cramp in her foot after waiting for so long. The bald headed man had watched his friend leave and had stayed downstairs. Every time she moved to leave, she would hear a noise that would keep her where she was. She peered at her watch, knowing the precious time was ticking by. <em>Madame will be furious if I failâ€|<em>

The bald headed man finally appeared, looking as refreshed as she was tired. He rubbed the back of his head, frowning at his watch. A call from down the hall caught his attention and he walked briskly back from whence he came.

The girl opened the door slowly, praying that it had been oiled recently. Her prayers were answered and she crept silently down the corridor, following the G.L.O.V.E. operative.

But which one was he? She had been told of several people close to her target but this man's face hadn't come up. Nor his friend's.

She rounded a corner and saw the bald-headed man converse in some other language to a well-built fair-haired man. German perhaps?

They continued down the corridor and entered through an ornate pair of doors. The girl hid behind a huge flowerpot and pressed her ear to the wall.

"and we don't have much time. Ja, Nero reckons that if Furan strikes, she will strike soon."

Voices murmured in assent.

"He wants the madame moved as quickly as possible. You both will escort her from here at dawn to another safehouse. I'll be on point for Nero's detail, do you both understand."

A low feminine voice chimed in, too soft for the girl to hear.

The German-accented voice laughed loudly. "Ja, ja do not worry. I will keep him safe. Try not to kill each other, eh?"

The door opened again to the sullen silence of the bald-headed man and the unseen woman and the boisterous laughter of the German. The two men marched back down the corridor with a purpose.

The girl eyed the corridor once up, and once down. She crept into the room to find a female silhouette framed by another fierce fire. Black hair was wound tightly at the nape of her neck. The woman was staring into the flames as if they knew her fate.

The girl felt a bead of sweat roll down her back, being detoured by the various scars she had acquired over the years.

She crept closer, eyeing the woman.

The woman turned and Natalya leapt on her. They fell to the ground with a frenzy of moving limbs and dark hair. A solid punch to the girl's head disoriented her momentarily.

She needed to end this before the men heard.

The girl whipped out her knife and brought the conflict to a stalemate by pressing the blade on the woman's neck.

The woman's eyes burned with rage. "\_Who are you?"\_

Natalya fought to keep her composure. "That doesn't matter. What does is who sent me. \_Where is Maximillian Nero?"\_

The woman smirked, with the expression vaguely familiar. "You'll never find him, little girl."

Natalya snarled. "\_Don't call me little."\_

She smacked her captive on the temples, causing the woman to slump into unconsciousness.

\_I will do my duty, Madame Furan\_

\* \* \*

><p>Nigel woke with a start.<p>

He couldn't tell how long he had slept. Had these caves ever see the sun?

He looked sidelong at Vivienne, frowning.

And promptly looked around for an insect of some sort. Having found one, he placed it carefully on the sleeping girl's face.

\_Wait for itâ€|\_

Waking with a shriek, Vivienne flung the worm away, all the while spouting a torrent of curses in another language.

Nigel waited until she turned to give him the slow-burn glare. He smirked.

"Didn't know you spoke Russian."

She stiffened.

"You never said where you were from, anyway."

Vivienne didn't look at him and busied herself in gathering their meagre supplies. "That's none of your business. I was in a few orphanages in Europe. Every time I ran away, they brought me to a new one. Now will we move, or not?"

Her companion shrugged nonchalantly and pulled off his boot, tapping and examining the sole.

"â€|What are you doing?"

Nigel ignored her and the heel of his boot slid open to show a hidden cavity. Full of vials, a small rectangular packet and a little box.

He carefully withdrew the little box, examining the water-proof cover. "When Nero told us we would be in Siberia, I took the liberty of nicking a few things from the quartermaster's storage area. One of which will hopefully help G.L.O.V.E. to find us."

The worm wriggled closer to Vivienne and stared at her. She glared at it and threw a pebble.

"Have you seen my glasses?"

Vivienne looked around and found them behind a stone pillar. Nigel took them and carefully put them in his pocket. Feeling only slightly blind, he fumbled with the packet to revealâ€|

â€|contact lenses.

The other Alpha raised an eyebrow. "Where did you get those?"

Nigel smirked. "Professor Pike. Normally I wouldn't trust his 'prototypes' but these ones seem alright. Should be useful considering my glasses are cracked." He opened the little box. "Now all we need to do is hide this somewhere safe and dry."

The little tracking device was tiny â€" a small disk of 2cm across. Nigel burst the bubble in the middle. "It's now fully operational and works on the specific frequency that G.L.O.V.E. uses. Hopefully they'll find us."

The bald-headed boy stood up and extended a hand to his companion. Vivienne smiled coldly at him. Still hadn't forgotten the worm.

Nigel slung the remaining pack onto his back and quickly spotted a passage leading off the main cave. "Ready to go?"

Vivienne blushed slightly. "I, um, just need to do stuff."

Nigel looked bemused. "With what?"

She scratched the back of her neck. "Euhâ€¦woman stuff."

Nigel flushed scarlet. "Oh, um, alright, I'll just wait overâ€¦" He scarpered off, completely ill at ease.

Vivienne watched him disappear with an ambiguous glare. That was clever with the worm. \_I'll have to watch himâ€¦\_

She spied the tracking device on a ledge above her head. Taking it in her hand, she looked at it.

And promptly crushed it under her foot.

\* \* \*

><p>The girl sat on the train seat.<p>

Bored out of her mind.

The dark-haired woman sitting across from her fought to contain a smile, amused.

"Not interested in Monsieur Hugo?"

Natalya frowned. "French is difficult as it is without readingâ€¦classics."

Her companion shook her head. "Culture is the benchmark of education, \_petit\_ \_oiseau\_, and your education was terribly narrow-minded to say the least."

The girl frowned again. "And where am I going now?"

The Frenchwoman looked pensive. "This is your third and last six months with me, so I'm delivering you to Diabolus. Heinrich is getting married so we'll be sending you to someone else after Darkdoom."

Natalya looked at her mentor. Really looked. She could see bags under her eyes, almost hidden by perfect make-up, a blossoming purple bruise almost hidden by a scarf and hands starting to shake from caffeine overload. Or maybe they were shaking from something else.

"And you?" she said softly. "Where are you going next? Is that the reason for the return express ticket you bought? St. Petersburg is nice at this time of year but Paris is nicer."

The woman's face darkened. "\_That's none of your business,

Raven."\_

The lights along the carriage went out.

\* \* \*

><p>Nigel looked at Vivienne.<p>

Vivienne looked at Nigel.

They had been wandering through the caves, finishing off the last of their food, when they heard voices. What looked like a paramilitary squad had suddenly appeared before them, chattering in Russian.

"What are they saying?" Nigel had mouthed.

Vivienne had frowned. "Somethingâ€|about their superior. They're mocking him. Wait â€" they said they're going back to base."

She had only had to had to look at the Darkdoom heir to see how determined he was to follow them. The group had continued on through the caves, accompanied by their unwelcome shadows.

Until they reached an ostentatious gate, clearly the entrance to the base of whichever evil-doer against G.L.O.V.E. this time. Nigel and Vivienne had spent the last hour watching the guard rota.

"Do you think we could sneak in?" asked Nigel. "There seems to be a slip-up every ten minutes."

"Well done, Master Darkdoom. Just half as clever as your father was at your age. You should be proud."

Nigel turned to notice several red dots winking menacingly on his chest. Several operatives had their guns trained on him. But what really interested him was the woman in black.

Vivienne was kneeling by her feet. "I have done as you wish, Madame Furan. All attempts to contact G.L.O.V.E. have been neutralised."

Nigel started at the name. It was one his mother used to scream out in terror during a nightmare. When he had asked his father, Darkdoom Senior had just evaded the question and rubbed his bald son's head. But his eyes told a different story to his nonchalant body language.

The woman looked at Nigel. "So glad you could join us, boy.

"I have great plans for you."

**\*\*Author's note:\*\***

**\*\*Second last chapter before summer! Woo! I had planned this fanfic before \*\_\*\*Aftershock\*\*\_\* came out but decided to incorporate a few major hints. Not that I'm going to tell you what they areâ€|\*\***

**\*\*Cairdiuil Paiste\*\***

## 14. B-Broken D-dreams

**\*\*Author's Note:\*\***

**\*\*This one was a monster to write (having exams didn't help either). Amazingly, they weren't that bad and I don't think I failed anything (eleven pages in Historyâ€|wasn't even pushed for timeâ€|yeahâ€|). No updates for definitely the next three weeks because of a language course. â€|Wonderful. No English for three weeks.\*\***

**\*\*At this stage, plot elements from\*\*\*\*\_Aftershock\_\*\*\*\*have been shamelessly used. They are quite noticeable (but if you haven't read the book never fear because I won't actually tell you which are my originals or Mr. Waldens).\*\***

**\*\*And I'm also leaving this chapter on a cliffhanger lash HUGE shocker. Heheheâ€|.\*\***

Hey," said Shelby.

"Vat is being up," seconded Franz.

"'Afternoon," murmured Wing.

"Hello," spoke Laura, quietly.

"Well, well, well. Look who decided to turn up," seethed Otto. "And you seem to have lost someone."

The recipient of this somewhat unwanted attention scowled. "Yeah well," said Nigel. "It looks as though you did as well. And G.L.O.V.E. clearly did some shoddy background checks."

Arthur and Adeline, tellingly, said nothing. The American boy was huddled in the corner, clearly not coping as well as the others. The timid Chinese girl was shivering by his side.

Otto matched Nigel's expression. "I suppose you ran into difficulties as well? Hm. Not surprised."

The Darkdoom boy raised an eyebrow, peeved. Laura surmised that he recognised Otto was angry. \_But would he know it was because of me?\_

Franz mimed scratching the air like a cat behind Otto. Nigel fought to conceal a smile. He crossed the cell and slumped down against the wall beside his friend. "No-one has any serious injury, I hope?"

"Nar."

"Well no one really..."

"Nope."

"...been hurt that bad but Laura..."

"Thankfully not."

"...has been hit on the head...how many times?"

Laura's heart jumped when she saw the look Otto was giving her. He had been caught between curiosity and horror when Stephen - if that was even his name - had eluded to her involvement in this debacle.

Over the hours since these emotions had blossomed into seething anger. Hence his catty remark to Nigel, his scathing response to the new students' fear and his overall livid demeanour.

Laura herself had felt vulnerable and now just wanted to get out. She wanted time. Time to explain why she had helped these people and how they had coerced her.

But what would she say? Hey Otto. Turns out I've liked you just as long as you've liked me! Allow me to express my feelings with a smooch! \*Smooch\* Oh and I also caused all of this destruction! Lol.

Nope. Why would she ever break it like that?

And of course the tension had only got worse following Nancy and Stephen's relentless taunts.

\_"It was so unbelievably easy!"\_

\_"I expected some resistance! Hawhawhaw!"\_

The pair had gone on to hint at the \*gulp\* dead and wounded, causing Wing to hit the wall in frustration.

What sounded like the crazy evil lady reprimanded them. They left with her.

\_"Laura?"\_

Otto was clearly expecting a reply.

She stuttered, hoping desperately that someone would rescue.

Today's knight in shining armour was Franz. "Ah, that may have been my fault. I may have accidently caused her grievous harm..." His voice trailed off as a result of Otto's glare. Laura didn't know whether to be pleased or annoyed.

"...We're not going to get out, are we," murmured Shelby. She was sitting by Wing's side, her boyfriend's arm around her. Wing's face darkened and he resumed stroking her hair.

Laura looked furtively at Otto, the others echoing her movement. He bit his lip and frowned.

A \_bang \_from down the corridor heralded the return of the terrible twosome.

Along with company.

Stephen smirked through the bars of the cell. "Ladies and gentlemen,

you're all to be moved. One lucky participant will play my uncle's favourite game."

The bored and bone-weary students cheered sarcastically. "Ja. I is super duper excited," murmured Franz.

Stephen's face fell and Nancy rolled her eyes behind him. "What this idiot means is that we'll throw you in a pit and watch you die."

"Whoop-de-doo," said Nigel. "Sounds delightfully exciting."

The faux-Alphas shared mocking smiles.

"That's what you think," sneered Stephen. "Now out you come."

The Alphas obediently filed out. Maybe because of the red dots blinking on their chests.

A crowd of guards waited to escort them to wherever the crazy evil lady wished. Speaking of, she was waiting there, Vivienne by her side. The Alphas gave her dirty looks and Franz cursed under his breath.

A shiver ran down Laura's spine as the black robed and veiled woman looked at her. She hissed a command "\_You know where to put them. I wish to speak to this one."\_

Despite his misgivings, Otto looked worriedly at Laura. His guard pushed him down the corridor, causing him to stumble.

The rest of them filed out, leaving Laura with the Madame and her silent shadow.

\_"Do you know I am, Laura Brand?"\_

The woman seemed to exude fear and power. A long black coat covered her frame, a dark veil shrouding her face.

Laura stuttered. "N-not-t r-re-really?"

The woman tilted her head, amused.

\_"Didn't Nero teach you anything? Never answer an answer with a question." \_Her every word was a hiss, a husky rasp. Chain-smoker?

She motioned to Vivienne to pull her over a chair. The dark haired girl was determinedly not looking in Laura's direction.

The woman sat, her stance imperious and superior. \_"I\_\_have\_\_trained the world's best assassins, child. Along with my brother. I believe you knew him?"\_

Laura swallowed nervously. Memories of a dying girl with black hair rose unbidden in her mind.

The woman laughed, a hacking, painful sound. She seemed to relax in her chair. "Pietor underestimated you and your friends' guile. But no matter. We can replace you all, can't we Vivienne?"



"Yes Madame," the girl murmured. She looked impassively past Laura, still not meeting her gaze.

Laura felt nothing but cold, dark rage. \_Traitor! \_she wanted to scream. \_We trusted you!\_

"...and needless to say, your family is alive. No need to dispose of them. Yet."

"My b-baby brother?"

"He'll live, don't fret. As long as you cooperate. But enough of that."

Vivienne finally looked at Laura, eyes full of pity.

"You have been worried about your payment? Education is the answer my dear."

Vivienne looked away from Laura and bit her lip.

Anastasia Furan stood up. \_"\_You will have the honour of becoming a Glasshouse operative. The complete antithesis of H.I.V.E., my Glasshouse will weld you into the weapon you have every potential to be. And if you break, you die. A past pupil was Raven, if you wish to know the standard. But you'll be better than her, won't you dear?" The Renaissance Initiative commander gave a pained look in Vivienne's direction (which in her case was practically a hug and a beaming smile).

Laura was struck by a sudden realisation. \_It can't be...\_

"Nero will never know what hit him..."

\*line break bruvvah\*

The door closed quietly.

The small room's occupant scowled at his visitor. "Why are you here? Haven't you done enough?"

Vivienne leaned against the closed door, pensive and somewhat curious.

Nigel yanked viciously at the steel shackles binding him to the iron frame of the narrow bed. Congealed blood lined his wrist.

He frowned again at the Glasshouse operative. "If you're here to gloat, don't bother. Your friends were already here."

Vivienne looked at him impassively. "Your father's here."

Nigel's face showed no surprise. "The terrible twosome already told me. Blah blah blah they're going to kill him, blah blah blah."

The girl crossed her arms. "You don't seem worried."

\_I'm just not displaying it.\_" He's survived these ordeals before. He'll think of something."

Vivienne just looked at him and he glared back. "Yet again, why are you here?"

A flicker of some indecipherable emotion crossed her face. "...I'm curious.

"You all seem so close."

Nigel rolled his eyes. "Yes. That's what friends do. What, you don't have any?"

The girl bristled in anger. "That's none of your business. I'm done here."

She turned to open the door and had her hand on the handle.

"...I know where I've seen you before."

She wheeled around. "I am done playing mind games with you people. And how can you possibly have seen me before all of this?"

Nigel smiled mockingly. "I knew something was off about you. And earlier, when your minions appeared, I finally understood."

At her snort of derision, he held up his free hand for silence. "Oh please. The only person they looked more terrified of was your leader."

Vivienne's eyes narrowed in distrust. "Those are Valentin Obolensky's men. Former G.L.O.V.E. men."

Nigel shrugged, a strangely Gallic-like gesture. "You know she only regards you all as tools. 'Weapons' was the word she used earlier."

"You know \_nothing \_about the Madame."

"And once you are all of no further use, she will dispose of you. And replace you."

"She won't replace me," said Vivienne confidently.

"At least in G.L.O.V.E. one has a certain level of autonomy. Oh and the pay is good and the tax (to the League) is relatively low."

The Glasshouse operative leaned against the door, amused. "If you're trying to convert me, you're doing a pathetic job. I have all I want."

Nigel laughed, a mocking sound. "How can you possibly know that? None of us know the extent of what we want." He gazed at her with curiosity. "Don't you have family?"

Vivienne's face darkened as the door opened.

"Well," sneered Stephen. "You'll never guess what we have in store for- Oh. What are you doing here, Viv?"

She ignored Nigel's smirk. "Madame Furan asked me to do a psych

profile. Has she finalised everything yet?"

The faux-Alpha nodded. "They're prepping the maze now. She wants you."

He opened the door and slipped through. Vivienne followed and he slung an arm around her shoulders, nattering on about how fab his uncle's place was and there's this cool piranha tank in which he puts annoying people.

As the door into Nigel Darkdoom's holding cell closed, Vivienne looked back to catch a glimpse of his smirk.

\_Don't you have any family?\_

A shiver ran down her spine.

\*line break bruvahh\*

The Alphas filed into the command room, weary and too tired to notice that one of their own was missing.

Vivienne and her fellow Glasshouse Operatives sat in the north-west corner. \_A perfect view \_Stephen had said. \_We can see both of them at the same time.\_

"When they moved him, he was apparently nattering on about method acting," murmured Nancy into Vivienne's ear. "Strange, don't you think?"

She nodded absentmindedly, her mind drifting away to other matters. She just wanted this over and done with.

Obolensky did a very good impression of a peacock's swagger. Swag for life, yo. Anastasia Furan's entrance quickly stole his thunder. She nodded at her protegÃ©s and disappeared into the shadows of the opposite corner.

The Alphas were made to sit on a two tier bench. Guards flanked them. One of them looked around, failing to miss the absent member of their troupe.

An entire squadron escorted Raven and Diabolus Darkdoom into the room. Clearly the Renaissance Initiative were taking no chances with the notorious G.L.O.V.E. operatives. A row of operatives obstructed Darkdoom's view of the Alphas. The pair were subsequently offered seats. With lovely rusty manacles.

Darkdoom smirked arrogantly at the former G.L.O.V.E. commander.

"Fabulous dÃ©cor, old man," he drawled. "Just a hint of desperation, insecurity and a dash of rotten luck. The mould in the corner is quite classy."

Obolensky unleashed an impressive sneer. "You just wait, \_old chap\_. That smirk will be wiped off your face soon."

"If you two are quite finished...", snarled Furan. Raven and Diabolus' faces drained of colour.

\_"You."\_

Furan smiled chillingly. "Hello Natalya. It has been a while. How's the arm Darkdoom?"

If looks could kill, the command room's occupants would be at the Russian's funeral.

Obolensky smirked. "Your standard is disappointing Diabolus. I would have thought family security would have been better."

A shiver ran down Darkdoom's spine but he masked it with a broad smile. "I assure you it's as high as ever."

The only response was a pair of chuckles.

"Good one, uncle," laughed Stephen. "So the perceived superiority among G.L.O.V.E. bigwigs is true."

Raven murmured at the side of her mouth. \_"Have you any idea what they're talking about?"\_

Darkdoom shook his head just enough for her to notice.

"Enough," barked Furan. "I have a pressing matter to deal with so commence the Maze."

One of the Alphas looked over the huge screen opposite them. A red light was blinking.

Obolensky walked over to Darkdoom. "I warned you," he said quietly. "I warned you when you took her from me."

His captive looked at him with pity. "You drove her away with your greed and selfishness."

"Oh please, you're practically describing yourself. You'll never see her again. At least in person." From behind his back he revealed his phone. He tapped it and the screen behind him whirred on, depicting two women. One had black hair.

At Darkdoom's look of shock, Obolensky smiled. "I assure you she hasn't been hurt. But once this is over, I'll make sure to tell her that it was your fault."

"She won't believe your word over mine," said Darkdoom confidently.

Obolensky smiled mockingly. "The only people who will know of my involvement in this charade are those in this room. And as far as Nero is concerned, I'm in St. Petersburg. Once you have all been dealt with, no one on the council will refute my claim to your seat. I'll be the Initiative's agent on the inside."

"G.L.O.V.E. and H.I.V.E. made you," said Darkdoom. "And this is how you repay them?"

"G.L.O.V.E. did not create me. I always had potential. Unfortunately you sneaked your way into Nero's good graces, leaving me out in the

cold."

Raven looked at her fellow countryman coolly. "What did they offer you?"

Addressing her question, yet staring intently at her companions face, he replied, "Everything I had ever wanted. And the tools to break my nemesis." He moved out of Darkdoom's view of the screen.

And went in for the kill.

\_"You forgot one thing, Diabolus."\_

Darkdoom struggled to look behind to see the Alphas but the manacles constricted his movement.

Obolensky laughed. A laugh of triumph. A laugh of victory. A laugh of anticipation.

"No use looking there, old chap."

Diabolus turned slowly, feeling absolute terror for only the third time in his life. The first had been when he had first met Anastasia Furan. The second when he had faked his death.

Anastasia Furan chuckled. \_"May the boy die with honour."\_

\*line break bruvvah\*

He winced at the pain from his shoulder.

He reckoned Stephen had dislocated it earlier when the boy was 'prepping' him. Blood oozed from a cut under his eye. He took a quick glance around him and remembered the backs of his friends as he was lead one way and they the other. They all had straight backs but he noticed the trembling of some. Method acting didn't work all the time.

An intercom crackled into existence.

\_"Welcome young student! You are today's participant in the maze! Conceived in the late eighties by a G.L.O.V.E. think tank, the aim of this idea is simple. There are three levels of the maze. Should you ascend to level three (surviving all of the obstacles on the way), you will be free to leave."\_

That was a lie. Stephen had pretty much told him that no one ever breaks free. Instead the participant \*coughdeaththrowdudecough\* was left in desperation to take one last look at freedom.

The grate in the wall above whirred menacingly and he dove under just before it blocked off the starting point. Stephen had told him about that too. Should one stay in one space for too long, they would be trapped and gassed. Lovely.

He gritted his teeth and stood up, eyes wary for any traps. Hearing another delightful whirring noise at his feet he quickly leapt over the increasingly wide crevasse.

He took a glance up the corridor. Stephen was lying. There had to be

a way out. Figuring out mind games was not fun and he already had a piercing headache.

He had to stay focused. He knew his friends were up there, along with high ranking G.L.O.V.E members, watching through the eyes of the ever-present cameras.

\_We're watching you.\_

He rounded a corner and saw that the floor was covered in tiles. Stephen had given him marbles. \_A quick death would be terribly anti-climatic. \_He rolled out a few onto the floor. At once several tiles dropped away while others stayed clear. He scratched the back of his head. Oh look, there was blood all over his fingers.

His head felt dizzy. Could he carry on?

Silently praying to whatever gods that may/may not have taken an interest in him over the years he jumped onto the nearest stable tile and jumped from one to the other.

His feet landed one tile from the edge. It started to move.

In terror he made a superhuman effort to dive onto the edge. The tiles all dropped away, leaving him hanging on the edge of the precipice. His arms screamed in agony and he inwardly cursed his lack of attention to Colonel Francisco's wisdom.

He began to slip backwardsâ€¦|

Line break

The Alphas were spellbound.

Laura was in shock.

\_This can't be happeningâ€¦|\_

They all watched in silence as he eventually hauled himself up onto the ledge and made his way through the first stage and through the second. Now that he had reached the third, Laura allowed a glimmer of hope to seep through.

The stares from the north-west corner were unsettling. One smile implied that she knew more than anyone.

Anastasia Furan whispered something in Obolensky's ear, looking impatient. He reluctantly tapped something into his tabletâ€¦|

LINE BREAK

The pain.

Dear God, the pain.

It hurt so much.

Someone make it stop!

A second blade whipped past his face. Glass fired everywhere. He

could feel the blood trickling down his face.

This wasn't supposed to happen.

He looked up.

The cameras around him documented his every move, constantly adjusting their positions to get the best angle.

He gritted his teeth.

No-one would see him beg for mercy. If he was to die, he would do so without humiliating himself or those watching by asking for help. Neither would he cry and whine the pain was too much.

Well it kind of was too much. But if he just concentrated on each second, on keeping his composure, on not breaking down in front of those cameras for everyone to see.

One Mississippi.

He just hoped his family wouldn't be too disappointed in him.

Two Mississippi.

That his friends would be alright.

Three Mississippi.

That they could adapt and move on.

A third and final blade came out of nowhere and buried itself high in his shoulder.

He staggered, and fell to his knees.

He knew there would be no more.

He knew death was imminent.

What are they thinking, those watching him from afar? Are they rejoicing in his death? Mourning him already? It didn't take a genius to know he was dying.

He always knew being part of G.L.O.V.E. would kill him. It had taken his father away from him, his mother, a grandfather and a grandmother.

He just didn't think it would be so soon.

The pain reached an all-time high and he bit his lip to avoid screaming out.

The blood was pooling around him " his own blood " it was almost like the shape of the lake above him. He bit back a maniacal laugh. To do so would expose a weakness, and if he knew anything about his days in H.I.V.E., it was not to show fear to your enemies.

His vision blurred.

He looked up into the nearest camera one last time, making the illusion he was making eye contact with everyone watching.

He fell on his side, thankfully not getting a blood facial.

His heart galloped towards its last beat.

Nigel Darkdoom closed his eyes.

And died.

**\*\*Author's Note:\*\***

**\*\*For those in the Northern Hemisphere â€" SUMMER! HOORAY! â€" & the other end of the world â€" WINTER! SNOW (in some places) WOO!\*\***

**\*\*Only a few chapters left. Thank you for reading (maybe an itty bitty review? \*bats eyelashes vaguely\*)\*\***

**\*\*Cairdiuil Paiste\*\***

## 15. In Memoriam (Part I)

**\*\*Author's Note:\*\***

**\*\*Somehow three weeks turned into eightâ€|sorry. For that, I'll have another chapter up either tomorrow or the day afterâ€|hopefully. \*\***

**\*\*Hope you're all enjoying your summers!..or school.\*\***

Diabolus Darkdoom was left frozen in shock.

His son, \_his heir\_, had been unceremoniously slaughtered for his enemies' entertainment. He could hear Valentin Obolensky laughing, the sound seeming distant, as if it were coming through water. He could hear someone weeping behind him, their companions either frozen like him or screaming abuse at Nigel's executioners.

Darkdoom could tell that Raven was sad but that it was the sadness she felt every time a H.I.V.E. student fell before graduation. \_You're wrong!\_ He wanted to scream at her. \_This is so much more different! That \_\_was\_ \_my son!\_

He wanted to weep, he wanted to scream, he wanted to make them all suffer. But he couldn't. In death, his son had shown that he understood more of his family's legacy, honour and ideals more than he had when he was alive. Never dishonour your family. Never display fear to your enemies. Die with honour.

Once upon a time, it had all been so different. Back in the day, Diabolus had rushed from one nefarious scheme to another, never balking at the size of his target. His wife and son had always stayed at home. Perhaps that was his first mistake.

\_Almost half a decade agoâ€|\_

\_The incessant clicking of his watch was (at this stage), annoyingly



similar to a bomb. All would soon change.\_

\_He wandered through the halls of this newest, yet oldest house. He had barely been in it himself, and yet his wife and child had called it home for almost two years.\_

Too long! \_he thought.\_ Too long in one place meant that his family was in greater risk than ever. \_

\_He should have expected this. He had been too long with G.L.O.V.E., too long in this business to forget that everyone has secrets. That every so often, an overturned rock will reveal maggots.\_

\_A wolf howled outside.\_

\_He cursed his sense of grandeur. This castle (why oh why a castle) was as isolated as a castle could be in Eastern Germany. The family who had built it in the eleventh century had lived there for 33 generations. A generous fee (and other forms of persuasion) encouraged the family to visit relatives in Australia for three years.\_

\_Darkdoom and his wife had both known the castle would be left vacant for at least a year before the family returned. But better to be safe than sorry. \_

\_Burg Eltz was built on a 70 metre high rock spur, surrounded on three sides by a tributary of the Moselle and had never been taken.\_

\_Inwardly he cursed. \_Where were they?

\_Through a narrow window he could barely make out the treetops below. Darkness fell quickly at this time of year, and the lack of light pollution made the darkness seem somewhat more threatening.\_

\_He warily pulled the window open, frowning at the sole road leading up to the castle. For a moment he thought he had heard cars.\_

\_Another wolf echoed the first.\_

\_Nigel and his mother had not been in their rooms last time he looked. A dull pain throbbed in his right hand.\_

\_Darkdoom knew it was late, he knew that there was little time left if he wanted to get out safely, while still keeping his family in the dark.\_

\_His plan was a close kept secret. He would execute the final phase and everyone would think that Diabolus Darkdoom had died. If it were possible, he would have brought his family with him but he would trust no one else with his operations but his wife. Nigel also had to attend H.I.V.E., where he would be safe and where Nero would help him shoulder the family mantle.\_

\_All was in place and dawn was but a few hours away.\_

\_Wearily closing the window, a flicker of light caught his attention.\_

\_Tonight of all nights his plant-mad wife and son had to be feeding their little monsters at half three in the morning. Diabolus resisted the urge to whack his head against the wall and made his way through the winding passageways and stairwells and hallways to the greenhouse. \_

\_The castle was too large to heat all of the time but Nero's most trusted Hydroponics scientist insisted on high energy usage in order to keep the plants happy. The bulletproof glass door (installed at his insistence) was slightly foggy from the artificial jungle heat inside.\_

\_Darkdoom slipped inside, his custom-made Italian shoes making no sound on the medieval flagstones. An overpowering smog of tropical spices almost made him stumble in surprise. Almost.\_

\_The air conditioning caused a few of the larger leaves to sway. Through another condensation covered door, he could see two figures in white lab coats leaning over something.\_

\_He stepped closer, wishing to talk to them but knowing that she was still angry with him, didn't. The red mark on his cheek was testament to that.\_

\_Mother and son murmured scientific babble to each other, oblivious to their third shadow.\_

\_A third wolf howled.\_

\_Inside the carnivorous room, Nigel turned and saw his father.\_

\_Diabolus Darkdoom smiled sadly and put his hand on the glass.\_

\_Farewellâ€|\_

\* \* \*

><p>Otto Malpense felt the same dread, grief and rage he had felt when Lucy Dexter had died.<p>

Would all of his friends be picked off slowly?

He had long since abandoned the ideals of an idealistic first year student â€" he understood that the majority of his peers would not die of old age. And quite frankly, he didn't \_care\_ about the majority of his peers (well, not much).

But which each passing day, Death stepped closer and closer, coming so close that Otto could almost hear the rustle of her robes, could almost see the light shining on her scytheâ€|

Out of all of them, Nigel had seemed one of the most innocent. Neither he nor Franz had been with the others on their first few adventures. They hadn't been attacked by H.O.P.E.'s twisted twins. They hadn't met Overlord on his super-duper-secret space station (not that many had been there either).

They hadn't seen Lucy Dexter dieâ€|

Otto had once written Nigel off as a weakling, a decaying link in the generations old crime dynasty. Leaving Nigel and Franz behind had been his only regret in plotting to escape the school back in first year.

Otto could tell that the bespectacled boy was plagued by insecurity, had low self-esteem and felt the burden of his family on his shoulders.

Which was why he was perfectly happy in giving the Darkdoom heir tutoring lessons in Science & Technology. Nigel was more of a fan of organic than inorganic substances but that didn't stop the boy pestering his peer for help (though Nigel regarded it as 'academic assistance' as opposed to 'I'M GOING TO FAIL HELP MEEEEEEEE').

Just to plague the boy, Otto took a while to consider the plea. The consideration took less time than he had wished because Nigel had seen through his ploy and offhandedly said he didn't mind. Oh. And a certain doodle he had found - \_Mrs. Ophelia Malpens\_e â€" (all over a little notebook) would make its hands into a certain Veronica Smythe. The biggest gossip in H.I.V.E., with her thirst for scandal only matched by her relentless quest to find the perfect embezzlement scheme (PoliFi in case you didn't guess). As one of the more obvious links to the grape vine (though Franz seemed to be dipping his toe into the viper's pit), word would undoubtedly spread. And reach a certain someone who Otto would not have liked to involve.

Otto (despite himself), was impressed by Nigel's determination to do better in his academics (though he was left puzzled as to how Nigel had procured the notebook). Noticing a steely determination in the boy's eyes that may not have been there before, Otto quickly helped Nigel through the basics and showed him a few tricks he had learned over the years. The lack of 'Politics Through the Ages' assignments to complete â€" Nigel's payment â€" definitely sweetened the deal.

Eventually, after months of sacrificing his Tuesday nights (lol. Like Otto \_needed\_ to study), Nigel had finally caught up with the class, with a much firmer grasp on the important principles. Otto could still recall the day that Nigel had proudly shown him a small reconnaissance device that could fly, float, drive or stick to the walls if necessary. The device was still nothing compared to a creation of Laura's, but it was still miles ahead of anyone else (bar himself) in the Alpha stream. Otto had made some adjustments to it and God only knows what Nigel was using it for \_("All in time, my friend, all in good time.").\_

If there was anything that Otto had learned through the hours of Nigel throwing his hands up in the air in frustration \_("like that makes sense!"),\_ was that there was more to the boy than met the eye. Maybe he had written him off too earlyâ€|

But none of that mattered anymore of course, as Otto looked at the numb face of Nigel's father, Nigel's friends.

Death had claimed another of Otto's friends for her own. And Otto would be damned if he didn't do anything to attempt to rectify itâ€|

\* \* \*

><p>Raven wasn't even looking at Diabolus but she supposed -  
<em>knew!<em> " that the man was still frozen in grief and shock.

And how could she blame him? To see one's child die must be devastating. Somewhat akin to the grief she could tell that Max feels every time a student falls

But, of course, only a fraction of what Diabolus must be feeling.

One hate of hers was wasted talent. What a shame, what a waste of untapped talent, after an impressive rise in his academic standard.

A key piece of advice that Max had given her was to never underestimate the youngsters " even if they were little more than children. Conscious of the weight dragging down her own heart, she thought sadly of the trials and tribulations these children had gone through. Would the death of another peer break them?

She had kept an eye on the Darkdoom heir through the years (out of respect to his parents and due to her own curiosity). She knew the boy had shied away from attention and had none of the supposed insufferable-ness of his father. She had also wondered whether the boy would ever be able to 'bear the family mantle', so to speak.

If it was any consolation, at least Nigel Darkdoom had not shown weakness. Many of his peers would have given up. The boy had been brave to the end, knowing exactly the situations in which to display a façade to the world

\_Almost half a decade ago

\_Raven dully fixed her attention on some ancient manuscript encased in a glass box. \_Aristocratic nonsense. \_She tried her best to ignore the increasingly private conversation behind her.\_

"I don't understand the pressure I'm going through, Max! He's left me with so many responsibilities and I can't help you. I want Nigel here with me."

\_Raven could tell that Nero was frustrated by the slight edge in his voice. "It is precisely the stress you are under that I am recommending this to you," almost pleading.\_

\_But his companion, as ever, was stubborn.\_

"\_No. \_No.\_ How many times must I repeat it, Max? I want him here, where I can keep an eye on him." At this her voice softens to a whisper. "He's not a carbon copy of him, you know. He's barely a child and all this pressure has been thrown onto his shoulders. His father basked in attention. Nigel prefers the shade."

\_Doctor Nero tried another approach. "In H.I.V.E., Nigel will be safe. He will receive the finest education and by the time he graduates, he will have been groomed into a more than capable heir.

Just \_consider \_my offer, dear."\_

\_As having known the enigmatic, ruthless wife of Diabolus Darkdoom for years, Raven was not surprised by the determined set of her jaw, the steely glint in her eye.\_

"Diabolus betrayed us," \_she hissed, her eyes flashing. "And do you not realise that his enemies will capitalise on this utter catastrophe? I have enough problems to deal with without losing \_my son as well as my husband?"

\_Nero objected (Diabolus having been a favourite of his). "Diabolus no doubt thought that he was doing his best for you and Nigel.\_ Every thing he did was for you both."

\_The Darkdoom widow looked away, replying in a cold voice. "He is a traitor to the League and my only regret is that I did not see this coming. I am utterly loyal to Number One and I will not allow my son to grow up as a clone of his father, I will not allow my son to betray us like his father did."\_

\_Raven knew what that really meant.\_

\_Nero's face softened. "No-one doubts that \_you\_ are not loyal to the League, my dear." \_\_\*\*We all know you would be foolish to pretend otherwise. \*\*\_\_"Nigel is your son as much as he is his father's. Careful management would ensure that no problems would arise." \_\_\*\*He will be safe to grow and learn and honour his father's memory at H.I.V.E.\*\*\_

"â€|"

\_Nero sighed, and pulled her in for a fatherly embrace, making sure that no-one was lurking in the grand Darkdoom family home library. If Raven had not been looking close enough, she would have missed the almost imperceptible sobs convulsing the widow's body.\_

"\_What happened after they came for him?"\_

\_The woman immediately stiffened, breaking away and rubbing her gloved hands absentmindedly. Her eyes brightened as she looked at her old headmaster, grief having stolen the light in her eyes, the rosy glow from her cheeks. She stared at him and gently stroked her right glove, which had a suspicious bandage-like bulge.\_

\_He in return looked at her sadly, inside seething that they would resort to such methods to ensure loyalty.\_

\_But, as ever, time was of the essence so Nero and Raven bid the grieving woman adieu. \_

\_A boy quietly appeared at the other end of the row, not having noticed the trio. With a slight build, glasses and a bald head, Nigel Darkdoom seemed only to share the latter with his father. His mother struggled to keep her composure when the boy withdrew a battered book from the shelf and quietly left.\_

\_Nero looked at her sadly. "There was a time when that tome was never out of Diabolus' hand."\_

\_His companion's mouth turned slightly upwards in a pathetic attempt at a smile. "He claimed that Machiavelli taught him everything he knew."\_

"\_Please consider my offer."\_

"\_No." With that, the woman gave them a curt smile and walked away.

\_Nero called after her. "I'll see you at the council meeting, won't I?" His only reply was a Gallic shrug. Nero sighed. "The boy will come to H.I.V.E. but I will need Maria's assistance."\_

\_After all, what Number One wants, Number One getsâ€|\_

\* \* \*

><p>Most of the time, Wing Fanchu could keep his composure. But now, composure and honour be damned.<p>

He cursed the efficiency of Obolensky's guards. The knife in his sleeve, the garrotte under his collar and the poisoned needle at his belt had all been taken. But they had missed the dagger in his shoesâ€|

He struggled to retrieve it, disregarding caution, only answering to \_rage.\_ A vicious backhand to his head stunned him, pain now equal to the anger.

"\_Foolish Boy,"\_ said Anastasia Furan, her features contorted in disgust. "Control your emotions." His only response was a look of pure loathing.

Obolensky was still cackling at his nemesis' expense. Wing felt a wave of pity and sympathy for Diabolus Darkdoom. A glance at his fellow H.I.V.E. students reinforced his desire for revenge.

Nigel Darkdoom had been one of them. And Wing Fanchu never left those who died without honouring their memoryâ€|

\_A Few Months Beforeâ€|\_

"\_Listen up, Third Year Alphas! Today we will be giving you a history lesson â€" of sorts. Fanchu, here!"\_

\_Wing felt the comforting presence of his girlfriend fade as Colonel Francisco picked him for yet another demonstration. As he made his way through the unenthusiastic crowd of Alphas, he could hear Otto and Shelby furiously laying down bets.\_

"\_It's going to be knives, the usual! Why else would he have a big box at the front?"\_

"\_Whatever, Malpense. That will be two \_Politics Through the Ages\_ assignments if Wing will make his opponent flip into the water again. One if the other guy falls over his feet and three \_Stealth and Evasion: Why & How\_ assignments if limbs are lost." A further chorus of whispers from surrounding Alphas ensued as they all fed their gambling habit. They say money is the root of evil. Look! The Alphas have created their own currency!\_

\_Colonel Francisco nodded sharply at Wing and gestured at the ornate box behind him.\_

"\_But what about the length?" hissed Gloria Larraby. "Surely it counts from the moment the weapons are shown."\_

"\_No!" countered Franz. "From the moment the opponent is revealed, ja?" His words were followed by a furious onslaught of winning odds (like, so in Wing's favour) and how spectacularly the opponent would fail.\_

"\_Silence!" bellowed the Tactical Education Educator. "Fanchu and Nigel Darkdoom will demonstrate our next discipline." More whispers further complicated the betting scheme. Nigel looked almost green.\_

\_Standing beside Wing, he gave a please-don't-put-me-in-a-coma smile. Wing generally got that smile off everyone eventually.\_

"\_We'll be using swords, boys and girls!-" Wing's hope rose. "-Those used in fencing." Wing inwardly groaned. Not Kendo so.\_

\_Nigel had a small smile on his face and carefully lifted the \_sabre. \_Wing had the vague sense of forgetting something important as he picked up his own. Franz quickly changed his bet as the whispers grew louder.\_

\_Wing had a bad feeling about this.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Arthur Richardson felt the same rising tide of panic freeze his limbs. He didn't want to be here. He had never wanted to be here. THEY WERE GOING TO KILL HIM NEXT.<p>

(He felt vaguely guilty concerning his own heightened sense of self-preservation, but he was sure that Nigel would understand. After all, it was Nigel that had convinced him.)

Arty's dad had wanted him to go into politics and help create another political dynasty. And, somehow, (he still didn't understand), he had ended up at H.I.V.E., and now here. All he had wanted to do was play baseball (and who cares if it's basically professional rounders. Rounders is fun!)

He remembered with sadness the evening of his second day when everything had felt just so \_overwhelming.\_ Every other student with sense had gone to bed. Arthur had been shocked into silence that another New York native had no idea what an iPhone was. \_"Apple just do computers and music players. Sounds a bit odd. \_This came from a fifth year PoliFi who also didn't know who Justin Bieber is (Bless her).

Would he be the same? Would technology, his friends, music, sport, life all pass him by? The wonder of being recruited to such an organisation had worn off and Arthur was feeling anxious about G.L.O.V.E.'s plans for him.

Nigel had found him, huddled on a couch next to the waterfall. The

Alpha smiled gently at him and merely offered him some hot chocolate. "Shelby calls it 'liquid happiness.'"

They had sat there for a while, in a comfortable, manly silence. Arthur had heard of 'The American male's inability to express his feelings' speech from his sister (numerous times). Perhaps the British were just as bad (stiff upper lip and all that).

"Have a touch of FOMO?" said Nigel casually.

Arthur just looked at him, bemused.

Nigel took a sip of his own hot chocolate. "â€|Feeling of missing out?"

"â€|"

"Everyone gets it eventually," said the bespectacled boy. "The lack of holidays only make it more acute. You won't see your family during some of the most formative years of your life. So you fret, and worry, and wonder whether they are safe and happy. Fear that they will forget you." He patted Arthur on the back. "You were just unfortunate to realise quickly."

Arthur took a sip of his own hot chocolate. "Does everyone get this? All your friends, the other Alphas and the other Streams?"

"Those with family obviously feel worse. Those without â€" like Wing â€" simply feel like they must honour their families and soldier on. Then there are those â€" like Otto â€" who never had family in the first place. I wouldn't recommend advertising your loneliness and FOMO to them as some can be quite irritable on the subject of family." Nigel winced. "Block and Tackle certainly wouldn't appreciate it."

The comfortable silence resumed, with Arthur now comforted by the liquid happiness, the soft gurgling of the waterfall and the feeling of having ally in this new, frightening world.

Nigel played with a gold ring with some fancy-schmancy crest. "You can survive here," he murmured softly.

"â€|if you know who to trust."

Thinking back, Arthur wished that Nigel had followed his own advice.

**\*\*Author's Note:\*\***

**\*\*Please review!\*\***

## 16. In Memoriam (Part II)

**\*\*Chapter Sixteen\*\***

**\*\*Author's Note:\*\***

**\*\*Thunder and Lightning makes a magnificent backdrop to writing this chapter â€" aaaaangst.\*\***



**\*\*Turns out the new H.I.V.E. book is out â€" HOW DID I MISS IT? And there's a Percy Jackson/Carter Kane crossover?\***

**\*\*Who can figure out what the growing Betty & Veronica trope refers to..?\***

**\*\*This is dedicated to the AlphaFive:â€|I plagiarised yo' phraseâ€|try and find it.\*\*\***

**\*\*Oh, and by the way, I don't own. Don't know where the Island is yetâ€|\*\***

Franz was absolutely devastated.

His best friend had been slaughtered in little more than a bear pit and who knows what would happen to his b-b-body. He cursed his mind, so unwilling to consider the horrors of life and only focus on minor details.

Whatever kept him sane.

His own uncle has been pushed off the edge into babbling insanity when his wife had died as a result of a family feud. Shocked by the death of such an innocent (Helga had had no interest in the family business), both families had arranged a truce. Terms had been swiftly met due to the incompetence of one of the main instigators. Franz had overheard his father saying that he doubted the idea of lasting peace. Would time heal the wounds..?

Franz's fellow Alphas were united in grief. Otto was rubbing his eyes furiously â€" no doubt he would later claim "eyelash! eyelash!" â€" while if looks could kill, Wing would have destroyed everyone who had a hand in Nigel's death. Shelby was frozen, like Nigel's devastated father. A lone tear traced down her cheek. Raven looked as unreadable as ever but a paler demeanour and a clenched jaw betrayed how she really felt. Arthur just had a terrified look of panic on his face. Laura and Adeline were sobbing uncontrollably in each other's arms, missing Anastasia Furan and her underlings' looks of contempt.

Nancy Russo seemed smug and relished in the despair and desolation weighing the H.I.V.E. students and G.L.O.V.E. employees down. Stephen Campbell Parker had an air of relief (?) and pleasure. But Franz saved his death glares for the third Glasshouse operative.

Vivienne Beauregard returned his looks with disinterest, seemingly without the courage to look at any of the Alphas properly.

He trusted you, you witch!\_ He wanted to scream. \_And look how you have betrayed him!\_

Franz had noticed the disappointment laced on his friend's features when Obolensky had thrown them all together for the last time. The bitterness when Otto had scorned his 'difficulties.' The elusive 'what-ifs' that Nigel had tried to keep hidden from the others. But Franz knew his best friend, he knew his roommate.

But now he was gone.

Who would help him escape Block and Tackle now? Who would

(begrudgingly) do his \_Politics Through the Ages\_ assignments when Colonel Francisco gave him (yet another) detention for still being \*ahem\* big boned (and a tad unfit)?

Franz remembered the evening when Nigel had marched in to their cell, angry and vengeful. And absolutely sopping wet.

"They caught me and threw me into the underground river! Since when does the Island have an underground river?" he had seethed.

Franz had been curled up on his bed, attempting to figure out the newest Science and Technology contraption. He had decided to pick Nigel's brain later (Otto being too absorbed in making his own contraptions to bother helping â€" \_"I have matters to attend to, Franz! Adios!" â€" \_and Nigel had somehow improved in the class, to Professor Pike's bemusement.

Nigel had paced up and down (about three steps to the bathroom door, then back, and so on). "We can't continue like this, Franz. Living in fear of two pumped up, steroid driven fourth years. And it's not just us they're after. Block and Tackle target some of the weaker PoliFi students and the majority of the SciTechs. This cannot continue."

Nigel had stopped suddenly (Franz was about to complain about an oncoming headache). "We can't get others to help us â€" Block and Tackle won't respect us either way."

He had turned triumphantly to Franz. "First, we will humiliate them. Then, we will let them wallow in anger and so on and then we shall give them the choice of humiliation again or a truce."

Franz had merely raised an eyebrow. "And 'ow do you possibly 'ope to accomplish this?" (his mouth was full of chocolate). "Unless you are secretly Superman, we don't have many options."

"No," Nigel had said, smirking evilly. "We have better."

**\*\*H.I.V.E.\*\***

Shelby just felt numb.

The last few months on the Island had just seemed a dream. She had been happy with Wing by her side and Otto was finally perking up after Lucy's death. Laura was letting go of her feelings of jealousy and angst towards the Contessa's granddaughter and Franz was getting less detentions than usual. And Nigel, \_poor Nigel,\_ had seemed to be coming out of his shell.

She should have known that it would never last.

Everyday was spent in blissful ignorance of the world outside. H.I.V. restricted access to the Internet anyway and so Shelby avoided the constant reminders of the death and destruction in the world. Yet every night as Laura slept peacefully, Shelby wondered was that her last day with Wing? Would something petty separate them, something stupid tear them apart.

What she had done to help Laura would do that job just fine.

Nigel and Franz had come to Shelby's assistance in order to \_acquire\_ (their word, not hers) certain items to which they had restricted access. Shelby had been happy to tell Laura everything they were planning, had even been there when Franz had spilled some of the rainbow tan on Laura's laptop.

Otto and Wing had been elsewhere when this had occurred and the four watched in amazement as the rainbow tan broke down every encryption firewall by merely being dropped onto the hardware. Some chemical had apparently reacted with the G.L.O.V.E. microchips and the rest was history.

Only Shelby had noticed Laura siphoning some off for her own use. Only Shelby had been asked to help her get through to H.I.V. 's main processing area. Only Shelby could have wondered whether Laura was hunting for something. Only Shelby could have figured out that the buddy-buddy relationship between Laura and Nancy was a sham, a mere fa ade to shield the aggression and intimidation behind the Argentinean's smiles.

Only Shelby could have known that Laura was the leak.

The hours studying frantically for exams had distracted Shelby. So had the hours running and hiding in the wilderness. Only during the hours of confinement when everyone was too afraid to speak of matters of consequence had Shelby pieced it together.

\_Laura, oh Laura! What have you done |?\_

She remembered the slight rift that had developed between Laura and Nigel, a mere week after the events of zero hour |

\_They were all quiet, as was the norm in the days after Lucy's death.\_\_ Someone would occasionally attempt to start a conversation (generally Franz or Shelby) and it would soon die of malnutrition.\_\_

\_Wing spoke softly, seemingly with a wish to silence his own curiosity. "Is your father still on the ruling council, Nigel?"\_

\_The Darkdoom heir didn't bother looking up from a \_Stealth and Evasion: How & Why? \_assignment. "No. Nero didn't want to show favouritism so it's a completely new council  " but all H.I.V.E. graduates, of course."\_

\_Laura gave a strange snort of contempt, albeit quietly.\_

\_Deciding to ignore her, silence resumed once again.\_

" |\_Was your father ever on the ruling council, Franz?" said Otto.\_

"\_Nein. We may have the largest criminal organisation on mainland Europe but Father has always been more concerned in developing the business than expansion to Scandinavia, the Western Isles, the Eastern States and North Africa. 'Quality, not quantity.'"\_

\_Otto leaned forward, having always been interested in families

(because he had never had his own). "Have you seen your family since being here?"\_

\_Franz was merely pensive. "Before I had left for H.I.V.E., my grandmother (who lives with my parents) was diagnosed with leukaemia. There was a time when â€" when it seemed she would not be making it. In first year, I believe. So Nero brought me to his office and I talked to her on the computer. She eventually grew better but she is not being as strong as she once was." As his anxiety worsened, his speech deteriorated.\_

\_Laura looked increasingly uncomfortable.\_

\_Shelby certainly had no plans of spilling her own guts about her dysfunctional family life. She supposed that Laura had been the happiest of them all before. The Brands had seemed normal, at least.

\_

"\_But you've seen your dad, though," said Shelby to Nigel. \_

"â€|\_I wish I hadn't."\_

\_At this Laura gave him a vicious glare. "Really? You wish you hadn't seen your father? At least you got those chances. I haven't seen my family for three years. I \_never\_ asked for this. I have no idea what they're doing, I have no idea how my extended family are and it's \_just not fair!"

\_The Alphas just sat there, on the couches in Accommodation Block 9 in shocked silence. This was the most anyone had said since Zero Hour. And it had come in the form of an angry tirade by Laura? Shelby was freaked out. Other students looked in their way with curiosity. Great. More Attention.\_

\_Nigel just sat there, ignoring Laura's vicious glares. "I wish I hadn't seen himâ€|"he began carefully, "because every time I do, he's dying or injured or we're all going to die and someone is (yet again) after us. For me, for Franz, for any other legacy student, we dread contact with our family. The rule 'No News is Good News' is held fervently by many." He looked at Laura calmly. "We all envy people like you. People with families who will not be harmed in their everyday jobs. People who will not be harmed in vicious feuds, by rival organisations, by ambitious nemeses. In our world, people like you, are considered lucky." He got up and just walked out, with just a hint of anger laced on his features.\_

\_Laura was avoiding everyone's eyes. Franz patted her on the shoulder gently. "A touch of FOMO, ja? Feeling of Missing Out? Come with me and we shall find ourselves some 'liquid happiness.'" \_

\_Shelby merely leaned against the boyf's side and sighed. Otto was still sitting there, furiously trying to distract himself with a quantum physics book. Wing just gave her a look.\_

Will Lucy Dexter's shade haunt us forever?

**\*\*H.I.V.E.\*\***

Laura couldn't stop crying. Tears were just pouring down her cheeks and she felt so \_\*sob\*\_ \_guilty\_. It was all her faultâ€|

Adeline was crying beside her as well. \_Poor girl just isn't suited for thisâ€|\_

Laura didn't mean for one of her friends to die. All she wanted was to keep her family safe. They \_took\_ her \_baby brother\_ for crying out loud! â€|A baby brother she didn't even know she had.

It all started when the new students came. Shelby was spending so much of her time with Wing those days, and Laura had felt a bit lonely. Nancy Russo had seemed to fill the gap. \_What a fool I was...\_

Now most of her peers were dead or missing, having been ripped apart by bears or drowned in the freezing water or unceremoniously slaughtered in a glorified, one-man \_Hunger Games.\_

\_All her fault.\_

And to think that Laura had resented Nigel for months before screaming at him in Accommodation Block 9. She had later apologised, shame-faced, and Nigel had the grace to ignore the matter afterwards.

One day he had come to her with questions on her specialty, hacking. Laura suspected that he had contrived the conversation to banish any lasting resentment but was perfectly happy in helping him. What Nigel was interested in was marrying one of his best subjects â€" Biotechnology â€" with one of his worst â€" Science and Technology. She considered painstakingly writing out the code using the method some weird tropical plant used to eat or something (she also suspected that only Nigel and the person who had discovered it knew about the plant). It might actually have worked but it just sounded too weird. (She still thought the plant was strange.)

Then that developed into a organic matter versus inorganic debate. Nigel (naturally) was the plant defender. "\_They're everywhere!" \_Laura (nobly) championed computers (and of course, in her opinion, she won). It had been the first evening she had relaxed since the Viscontessa's death. Yet stillâ€|

\_...All her faultâ€|\_

**\*\*H.I.V.E.\*\***

Adeline Yao Li was just sobbing uncontrollably. She didn't care about the lack of composure. All the panic and fear and grief and loss just made her sob even harder.

One of the few people who had been nice to her in H.I.V.E. was dead. She had watched him die. It was so sad.

She had been there on the night when Arthur had almost broken down with his touch of 'FOMO.' Curled up herself at the waterfall, she had heard every word. Thinking that she had been stealthy, she was surprised when Nigel smiled at her and patted the space next to him (though it was really the third, appetising hot chocolate that had convinced her). The three of them had just sat there, in the atrium, sipping hot chocolates.

"â€|the Hunt sounds real scary," said Arthur. The others nodded.

"The current record," began Nigel, "is around twenty-four hours. All I'm planning to do is stay out a respectable twelve or even sixteen hours (if I can wrangle it). It would be insane to attempt to break it." The others nodded in agreement.

"Can people die?" asked Adeline, tentatively.

"â€|only the foolish ones."

She had shivered in reply. \_Would she be a foolish one?\_

Arthur seemed rejuvenated by the hot drink. "Who holds the standing record?"

Nigel sipped his own liquid happiness glumly. "My, em, dadâ€|"

"Must be some kinda hot-shot from what I've been hearing," pronounced Arthur. "And I have heard lots of rumours."

Across the atrium, Wig and Shelby appeared. Had Adeline mentioned it was after hours? Nigel saw them and smirked evilly. "Let's name and shame them when they get closer. Their cells are next to the waterfall so they'll pass us. And I don't think they have seen us yetâ€|"

"Oh, and what rumours have you heard, Arthur?" inquired Adeline, interested to discover more about Nigel's mysterious family. Wing and Shelby had stopped to do an annoying couple thing that made her taste bile. \_Tut, tut. Public place.\_

Arthur smirked. "Well, there was the one where he led the school out of the soon-to-be-infiltrated Alpine facility. On skis. In the midst of an Alpine blizzard. And he was in first year."

"Correction," countered Nigel lazily. "My mother and Franz's dad helped him. And it was a clear, snow-free night." \_...for the most partâ€|\_

"\_Aaaand," \_resumed Arthur. "He was Head Boy and has his name on every single trophy in this school. His name even adorns the title for some smart cert of academic excellence." He looked over at Nigel for a rebuttal.

"â€|wouldn't be surprised," murmured Nigel, underneath a pillow.

"\_Aaaaaaaaand,\_ even better," started the American, an even bigger smirk on his face, "â€|several tales about certain \_friendships\_ he made-"

"Please," retorted Nigel. "Don't want to know. I'm thinking of my mother here. Please."

The two new Alphas just smiled and laughed quietly. Nigel was saved by the appearance of the third year Alpha lovebirds. Wing and Shelby still hadn't noticed their spectators. Who proceeded to applaud them mockingly as they whispered sweet nothings in each other's

ears.

"Well, well, well," smirked Nigel. "Wasn't curfew an hour and a half ago?"

The other two agreed. "And what," said Arthur, "could possibly have occupied you both all this time?"

All three Alphas roared with laughter as Wingelby gave them dirty looks and disappeared up the stairs, clearly having decided to say goodnight somewhere more private.

\_Yes\_, Adeline had thought, smiling tentatively. \_One can survive hereâ€¦if they know who to trust.\_

**\*\*H.I.V.E.\*\***

Mr. Block was having a bad day.

The shower switched between hot and cold faster than one of those kids trying to run away from him.

At breakfast all the first years cut in front of him.

He received no delicious English breakfast muffins.

He was knocked out by his opponent in Tactical Education with one blow. The Big C said he was no longer tying with Mr. Tackle for head of the year of the Henchmen stream.

And he couldn't even throw the usurper under a stalagmite. Or stalactite (or whichever one falls from the ceiling) because the new head was a \_girl.\_ And Colonel Francisco's \_niece.\_

Thankfully, though, the rainbow tan had worn off. Mr. Block was devastated that he couldn't express his gratitude to Darkdoom in person. The King of the Nerd Herd was off on his own. Mr. Block had enjoyed his own Hunt. He had hunted down a group of dangerous Alphas that had wished to break the record before Raven did. Mr. Block and Mr. Tackle had reached the fifteen hour mark. Apparently some Alpha in the late Seventies/early Eighties had managed to evade Raven's predecessor for twenty four hours. Such a legend. Can't be related to Darkdoom, so.

Mr. Tackle cracked his muscles aggressively.

"Let's give Darkdoom the welcome home he deservesâ€¦"

**\*\*Author's Note:\*\***

**\*\*Gone back to the ole' 'H.I.V.E.' instead of line breaks. The reason I stopped using them was that kept on displaying 'H.I.V.' insteadâ€¦\*\***

**\*\*For once I've updated two days in a row XD ! Only thing is, I'm tired now. \*yawn\*\*\***

**\*\*Please Read & Review!\*\***

## 17. Red Eyes, 'Inheritance' and ISIS

**\*\*Chapter Seventeen\*\***

**\*\*Author's Note:** Short but necessary. And **\*\*\_\*\*Deadlock\*\*\_\*\***'s amazing! It's nice to finally have a book for reference (there are no doubt numerous conflicting statement with canon).**\*\***

**\*\*Turns out 'sesquidecade' is the term used for fifteen years " who uses it?!\*\***

Diabolus Darkdoom looked up at Valentin Obolensky with murder in his eyes.

"You will wish you had been decapitated on your wedding day when I'm through with you."

Obolensky merely smiled mockingly. "Fabulous plan, Darkdoom. I'm just wondering how you will implement it." He tapped his tablet and confirmed that the escape pod was still available. If this whole debacle went south, he wanted a guaranteed escape route " before Furan. The woman seemed to be tiring of his incessant chatter and Obolensky dreaded her disapproval.

Yet this was his show, regardless of the help of the Disciples. And to hammer the nail into Darkdoom's coffin he would add a little touch" |

"Bring the boy's body up here. Then we will move onto the next stage."

Obolensky then considered the restrained woman next to Darkdoom. "And what do you want to do with this one, Furan?"

"Kill her and the ones involved in my brother's death. Then we must leave." There was an edge in her voice that sent a shiver down Obolensky's spine. \_But he still had control, didn't he?\_

Furan stood in front of her former protégé and held her chin in a vice grip. "As tantalising as the notion is to keep you, the cons outweigh the pros. Kill her before she becomes a nuisance, Obolensky. My brother and countless others decided to wait rather than act and that cost them their lives."

Obolensky ignored her response. "No, I have a better idea." Vivienne Beauregard yawned in the corner and closed her eyes. "We'll bring up the cadaver, show it to daddy dearest and then kill the boy's roommate, kill those you want killed and \_then\_ we'll leave, self destruct the place and blow Darkdoom to hell with it. Capiche?"

Stephen Campbell Parker frowned at him from the corner, his grip tight on the armrest of Vivienne's chair. Obolensky understood that his sister's boy was warning him not to mess with Furan but he did not care. This was \_his\_ moment. One he had been waiting for years to experience.

"Sir? The retrieval time haven't reported in yet."

Valentin dismissed his technician's concerns. "Maybe the blood is all



over their clothes and mommy's washing it for them. It's just a simple retrieval. The maze is merely underneath us."

Diabolus Darkdoom had never believed in the supernatural but a shiver ran down his spine as a ghost whispered in his ear to stay quiet. The manacles behind his back sprung open.

Another technician turned to the Russian. "Sir, I've discovered an anomaly in the footage involving the Maze." Obolensky felt a shiver of dread.

"Problems, Valentin?" sneered Darkdoom.

\_Maybe\_. "No, Darkdoom. Go back to your grief-induced coma." The technician played the footage of Nigel Darkdoom's dead body in the death trap. The footage flickered for a second.

"There, sir. As exhibited between these two moments, the subject disappears. The footage further on seems to be just a loop."

A shiver ran down Raven's spine as her manacles opened.

"Sir, we've found the retrieval team."

Obolensky snarled. "Get me the team leader."

"You can't sir."

Anastasia Furan answered the technician. "Excuse me, \_can't?\_"

The woman in question swallowed nervously. "Team Three found them in the Maze—or at least what's left of them. It seems the traps were not turned off."

Valentin pinched the bridge of his nose. "I thought I had sent them down with the proper codes!"

"You did, sir," added the techie. "Someone overrode the switch. Using your pass-code."

Furan turned sharply to her Glasshouse operatives but Obolensky's attention was drawn to a certain white-haired boy. "Malpense! What have you done?!"

Otto looked merely annoyed. "You have your network shielded. How can I possibly interfere with it when I have no access to a hub?"

The former member of the G.L.O.V.E. ruling council snarled. "Then how did this happen?"

"How do you think?"

Obolensky turned slowly, seeing \_in his chair\_ someone he had seen die with his own eyes—

\_Earlier—\_

Nigel winced as the goons dropped him into the pit, hoping that his new fashion statement wouldn't burst on him before they were needed. His entire body ached from the beating he had received from Stephen.

He had gathered enough from the chatter of the guards that he just needed to go down this corridor and up.

He just hoped his friend on the inside would hold up their end of the hastily-made deal.

\_(Months) Earlierâ€|\_

Vivienne dispatched her last mark to the ground with a pinch of a vital nerve ending. Looking at the unconscious bodies around her, she almost purred with satisfaction.

"Exemplary as ever, Vivienne. Wake the rest and clean up. Afterwards you are to come to my office." Anastasia Furan left (along with her entourage) and Vivienne poured water on her peers' heads with glee.

Stephen groaned from behind her. "The temples? You had to knock me out by hitting my temples?"

"You were too slow. Did you lose more than your knife in Berlin?"

Nancy sat up, pulling her hair back into a ponytail. "What does the Madame want us to do now?" Around her the rest of the Glasshouse operatives slowly got to their feet.

"The usual," said Vivienne. "She will be choosing the operatives for the Hunt the day after next so make tomorrow's drills matter. Go and rest. You have all earned it."

Nancy and Stephen, as usual, stayed behind. They, as norm, sat together in the canteen, and, as per their routine, gossiped about whatever assignment anyone would receive next.

"I'm guessing Europe," drawled Nancy. "She hasn't sent one of us there in weeks. She'll probs send you, Viv."

Stephen shook his head. "No, no, no. North America. We've been doing research on the politics, culture and geography for weeks."

But, breaking the routine was Vivienne. She tuned out the conversations of those around her, focusing her attention on Anastasia Furan's words. That Vivienne would be told of her 'inheritance.' "I have to go," she blurted. "Excuse me." She made her way to Anastasia's quarters, ignoring the curious stares of her peers.

She had realised a long time ago that Furan gave her far more autonomy than the others. She was also given more work, more field assignments and had been sent to enforce obedience to the Disciples more times than she could count. Having been at the Glasshouse for as long as she could remember, she thrived on being let outside to see (what she could) of the world. Perhaps now she would discover whyâ€|

Anastasia looked up from her paperwork as Vivienne entered her office. "I have been finalising the operation for H.I.V.E. You will lead sixteen others on the Island but I want no suspicions on Nero's part. All of you shall be separated beforehand to consolidate your

cover stories. You shall be a pickpocket in Moscow. I thought it (as well as the number involved in this operation) to be an ironic touch. Once you reach Siberia, you must separate Otto Malpense and his friends and guide each one to our operatives. Lisbeth will head our forces. And if Raven comes near youâ€¦"

Vivienne looked confused, considering this to have an obvious answer. "â€¦Kill her?"

Furan sighed with barely concealed irritation. She adjusted her thick turtle neck which covered all of her neck. "No, child. Run as you have never run before. You may be the only one here capable of besting her sixteen year old self but Natalya is in her thirties now. The least I expect is for her skills to have improved. I did train her."

She looked at Vivienne coldly, sending the usual shiver down her spine. "I have not raised you here for fifteen years to just let my prize investment be damaged before I can fully implement your abilities."

The girl merely nodded, restraining the urge to brush a hand through her thick hair.

"And that must be dyed," said Anastasia imperiously. "Far too noticeable." She withdrew a folder from the pile of papers on her desk.

"You are almost sixteen now, Vivienne. In two years you will leave the Glasshouse and never return. You will serve the Disciples with fervent obedience. You will never question us; nor shall you not do what you are told. One day, when I am dead, you will take up my mantle. That shall be my gift to you. The Glasshouse shall be yours and the Disciples shall be yours to command."

Anastasia studied the girl before her. The distinguishable hair, the lean build from a decade and a half of ruthless training and the eyes. The eyes that sent a shiver down her own spine every time she looked at the girl.

"You have trained here all of your life and are one of my greatest achievements. Natalya helped you walk and you learned your first kata from her. She later betrayed me and one day I shall pay her in kind. But you shall not leave my service, child."

"No, Madame," said Vivienne, inwardly wondering where on Earth Furan was going with this tangent.

Furan gave what passed for a smile. "You will not betray me because we are tied by bonds tighter than you think."

"You are the strongest operative being trained in the Glasshouse. You have the fastest reflexes, the greatest stamina and undoubtedly a ruthless disposition. Through your extensive studies (wider and more detailed than anyone else here), you are the most knowledgeable, the cleverest, the one who knows more languages than half of my senior staff. I have granted you certain autonomy; given you a place of command among your peers and you have extra-ordinarily exceeded my expectations."

"In short, Vivienne, I have groomed you for leadership."

Breaking her routine of speak-when-spoken-to, Vivienne questioned Furan's motives. And Furan told her the truth.

With just four words, the world that had been carefully constructed around Vivienne shattered irreparably. Four words caused her to question her entire existence. Four words planted the seeds of doubt. Four words changed her entire mindset forever.

\_LINE BREAK\_

Vivienne gasped for breath. Being thrown against a wall once a week was never a fun thing to do.

"Slow, as usual." Mocking. Self-righteous.

She spat blood, hating the (now) familiar feeling of being outclassed. "At least I'm smarter than you, idiot."

"Wrong, as usual." Self-righteous. Mocking. "I have now surpassed your mediocre grasp of the European languages. I believe I am on thirteen; you are no doubt still on a pathetic eight."

Vivienne glared at the boy. "\_Nine,\_" actually."

Red eyes gazed at her coldly, without any trace of compassion. "I still don't understand why we need you. With further advances, you are practically redundant. You can barely accomplish the simple tasks set to you."

Her nostrils flared in irritation, the feeling of being dismissed and disregarded making her want to play with knives. A small voice at the back of her head told her that she wasn't alone with this trait.

The girl stood up, playing up the pain around her ribcage. "What ever happened to 'respect your elders'?"

A cold, smug laugh was her only reply. "You may be older but I am physically superior, mentally wiser and what was it? Ah, simply superior." He walked closer to her. "Then again, you are the only worthy girl. Since the others are mere animals."

She looked at him with just the hint of surrender coincidentally flashing in her eyes. Red eyes relaxed, easily blocking her jab to his throat. "Aw, too slow \_little sisterâ€¦\_"

A feint to the jugular, a punch glancing off his side and a light jump to dodge a dangerous kick was her response. None of it mattered as she quickly found herself held up against the wall, her sparring partner's hands in a vice grip around her throat.

"We are so much better than them. And I am so much better than you. The sooner you mature and commit to the role given to you, the better."

Vivienne smiled. A smile modelled on Furan's 'Stare of Death.' One that would send shivers down any normal person's spine. A smile she had perfected by the age of six.

"One day, \_brother,\_ I will be able to display to you exactly how I feel about my \_role.\_" And promptly kneed him in the balls.

He collapsed in pain and Vivienne was left smiling smugly, a bruise starting to form around her throat. "Remember that while there are more of you, there is only one of me. Which means that I may not fall so perfectly into place like you expect the others will."

She looked down with disgust at the hair colour they shared.

"\_Unpredictability,\_ boy. Without being able to cope with it, you will fail just like He didâ€|"

**\*\*H.I.V.E.\*\***

"How do you think?"

Valentin Obolensky felt the unfamiliar feeling of being thwarted.

Memories coursed through him of being bested again and again by another man, decades ago. Memories of losing his father's respect, his fiancÃ©e's love and his control. His control over everything.

Nigel Darkdoom was sitting smugly \_in his chair\_, wearing an ISIS (Integrated Systems Infiltration Suit). The ghost was flanked by three figures (also in the same suits). The quartet also had friends, as illustrated by the security feeds and Obolensky's own eyes.

"Miss me?"

**\*\*Author's Note:\*\***

**\*\*DID YOU HONESTLY THINK I WOULD KILL ONE OF THE MAIN CHARACTERS?! A CHARACTER INCLUDED ON THE FANFIC CLASSIFICATIONS? THE CHARACTER I BASICALLY WROTE THIS STORY ABOUT BECAUSE THERE IS A DEPRESSINGLY SMALL NUMBER OF FANFICS ABOUT HIM?!\*\***

**\*\*Rant over. Please R&R :)\*\***

**\*\*Cairdiuil Paiste\*\***

## 18. Lies, Relief and St Petersburg

**\*\*Chapter Eighteen\*\***

**\*\*Author's Note:\*\***

**\*\*Turns out the Dreadnought was blown to pieces and dropped into the Atlantic in Book Four. Oops. But \*\_\*\*Dreadnought\*\*\_\* was the only book I didn't own in the series as of two weeks ago. As further editions will be made after the fic's conclusion, all discrepancies shall be taken care of. \*\***

**\*\*Enjoy!\*\***

"Miss me?"

Valentin Obolensky felt everything around him shatter. The security feeds told him that his men were down "outgunned, outclassed, outfoxed. He had failed.

Anastasia Furan was going to kill him. He swallowed nervously.

Nigel Darkdoom looked at him, eyes bright and alive with victory, triumph strengthening his weary bones. "You do not deserve your reputation, Obolensky," he said quietly, his soft words causing all to focus attention solely on him. "It seems my opinion of you was misguided. No feared, no respected and no G.L.O.V.E. commander with any merit would have been so foolish as to let their guard down at such a crucial moment. An animal is most desperate when it is trapped."

Every word from the boy's mouth was another nail in the Russian's coffin. "Your people did not notice the arrival of H.I.V.E. personnel. They didn't notice until it was too late. You didn't notice until it was too late. Standards seem to have fallen dramatically."

Obolensky just stared at the boy, dread filling him with every word.

Nigel smiled, a cold smile meant just for the man who had sent him to his death. "Even more pathetic was how simple it was to fake my death. My blood, which spread around my corpse, wasn't mine at all. Stolen from the medical centre, it is yet another example of how low your standards have fallen. The blades of the maze were shortened and given a duller edge. The ISIS' body armour caught the blades before they touched my skin. Your facility's firewall was so weak that it was child's play to allow the feed to loop. All it took was a bit of acting that I was dying and you believed every single second. Nero's support team was let in the main door as two of your operatives went out to feed their nicotine habit. Fully equipped and exceptionally trained, they were well capable of restoring the power balance."

The boy looked at him, a cold rage contorting his features.

"That was for taking my mother."

Obolensky was terrified. Furan was going to kill him. He was dead - G.L.O.V.E. would never have him (the Darkdooms would see to that) and the Disciples would make an example of him to the other former council members. I am a dead man walking!

His breath came in erratic pants as he forgot how to breathe. He had been in desperate situations but this was the worst. He knew at last that his career in G.L.O.V.E. was over. He had graduated from H.I.V.E. with optimism, a mere decade later he had lost the only woman he ever loved to the one man he truly hated. Twenty five years after leaving the Alpine H.I.V.E. facility everything he had worked for was mere ghosts in the wind. He was finished.

"H-h-ho-how?" he spluttered desperately.

Darkdoom's son smiled. "I had help."

"F-f-fro-m w-h-h-o-o?"

"Me," said a quiet voice from the corner.

"\_You.\_"

Regardless of how much Anastasia Furan wanted to kill him, Obolensky got the impression that she wanted to kill Vivienne Beauregard more.

The girl was standing, a look of defiance on her face and the bodies of her fellow Glasshouse operatives lying unconscious at her feet. Furan merely responded with the Stare of Death.

From the corner of his eye, Obolensky noticed the look of exasperation Otto Malpense was giving Nigel. "\_Really? This is like the time where your dad said he would cause a distraction. He blew up the Dreadnought. Do you all have to be overachievers?!"\_

In front of the boy, Raven was just staring at the old woman and her protégé with a look of fear.

If looks could kill, Vivienne would have been slaughtered by Furan by now. "You have \_no idea\_ what you have done, child. Do you think Nero can protect you?"

The girl only smiled bitterly. "Anything's better than that \_hellhole\_ you call a home."

Furan took a step closer to the girl. "After all I have done for you. Answer me one question, Vivienne - \_why?\_"

"Stay where you are," the girl retorted. "And if you hadn't underestimated your own capacity for independent thinking you would understand."

Valentin eyed the exit.

Furan laughed mockingly. "Were those philosophers you studied too high-brow? Are you going to lecture me on \_morals\_ and \_ethics?\_"

"If \_you\_ had been told what you told \_me\_, you might understand. Doesn't the notion repulse you? Because it \_disgusts\_ me," Vivienne snarled. "You have only yourself to blame for this disaster." Her voice grew softer as she changed to Russian (a language conveniently only three people in this room knew). "Had you any idea that knowledge of my 'inheritance' would challenge everything I had once thought secure?"

Furan sneered at her. "You have made a grievous mistake. Repent now and after several months you may regain freedom."

"\_Fabulous\_ incentive, Madame. You're a wonderful negotiator."

Valentin once again eyed the entrance, realising it would take four steps to reach the exit with another two if he grabbed a guard's gun. Then he would have no trouble reaching the escape pod.

Vivienne shook her head in disgust. "You have no idea what you are dealing with. You are playing God with us. Do you really think they will listen to you?"

Furan snorted. "I have their undying loyalty child. It is you who does not understand."

The girl spoke even more softly, beseeching the woman before her to understand. "He does not trust you, Madame. None of them will. They hold the masses in contempt and will not stop until they have carried out his wishes. Kill them while you still can."

Anastasia merely sneered and Obolensky saw something break in the girl. One last shred of loyalty to the demented psychopath in front of her. "I gave you everything, child. You had a more privileged upbringing than any other Glasshouse operative."

"Never let it be said that I did not try, Anastasia Furan." Vivienne's voice was quivering with some unreadable emotion. "What was it you said?" The tone mocking, self-righteous. "'You are the strongest operative being trained in the Glasshouse. You have the fastest reflexes, the greatest stamina and undoubtedly a ruthless disposition. Through your extensive studies (wider and more detailed than anyone else here), you are the most knowledgeable, the cleverest, the one who knows more languages than half of my senior staff. I have granted you certain autonomy; given you a place of command among your peers and you have extra-ordinarily exceeded my expectations.'

"You may have given me everything, but you underestimated me. You underestimated yourself."

It was only afterwards that Valentin truly pieced it together. Everything happened so fast.

There was suddenly a knife in Furan's hand but before she could move, a bolt of electricity struck the floor right in front of her. Vivienne Beauregard ran out, with Furan close behind her.

The last sight that Obolensky remembered was that of Raven withdrawing her swords and running after them. Then a tap on his own shoulder caused him to turn to meet Diabolus Darkdoom's fist.

**\*\*H.I.V.E.\*\***

Raven ran out of the command room, finding no resistance as the only people she encountered were dead. She ran faster, knowing that she had to get to the girl before Furan did. She skidded to a halt at the escape pod. Or at least the hatch that had led to it.

Vivienne Beauregard walked slowly out of the shadows, a cut on her neck oozing blood. "She's gone. I led her here and left her the choice of fight or flight."

Raven nodded calmly, still not comprehending how she did not recognise the girl when she had first reached the Island. "She has left to fight another day. Will you come with us?"

The lost girl shrugged. "I have no where else to



go."

**\*\*H.I.V.E.\*\***

Nigel Darkdoom grinned at his friends. And then found it difficult to breathe.

The FabFive (Four + Franz) all kept on clapping him on the shoulder and crying and hugging him until he couldn't breathe.

"Can't breathe guys," he gasped. "GUYS."

Shelby and Laura were just beaming at him and Shelby kept on patting his head. "Oh look what the shock did to your hair, Nigel!" Franz was almost crying with happiness in Wing's arms (who looked a bit bemused, yet still content). Otto merely smiled proudly, casually whacking Nigel on the back from time to time. "My influence has paid off."

Adeline and Arthur were off to the side, shyly staring at the ground and watching the brawl between Diabolus Darkdoom and Valentin Obolensky from the corner of their eyes. It seemed that Obolensky had damaged Darkdoom's shoulder but sported a magnificent black eye himself.

Nigel just looked at the new students. "Hello?! It's not everyday someone comes back from the dead!" All the Alphas just smiled and chattered happily with each other, ignoring how tired they all felt. Until Franz yawned and set off a chain reaction.

Raven walked up to the group, Vivienne shadowing her. "Who's winning?" said the Russian, nodding to the brawl.

"Just be waiting," replied Franz. The Alphas all winced. "Well, that's that finished," murmured Otto. Wing nodded. "Most inventive use of the ball-point pen."

"I'll bring you all to the Shroud now and we will prep for the flight to H.I.V.E. I take it you're all tired?"

"Eh, \_no," \_disagreed the Alphas. "Like almost three days of non-stop action could drop us," uttered Shelby.

Raven frowned at her, the barest hint of smile on her face. "Sarcasm is the lowest form of wit, Shelby."

Wing disagreed. "I thought it was pictures of cats." The Alphas laughed a little too hysterically at the expression on the assassin's face.

"To the Shroud, students. And no detours!" Raven sent three G.L.O.V.E. operatives with them just in case. This group warranted such measures.

"Laura, wait!" blurted out Vivienne, as the Alphas turned to leave. The red-haired girl looked at the others in unease.

"We'll see you both at the Shroud," smiled Otto, the fakest of fake smiles on his face.

"Don't be killing anyone!" joked Franz. The joke fell flat as the Alphas looked at each other uneasily. Franz frowned and turned to Nigel. "Do you think it will be the four or five?"

Nigel deeply considered it. "Five. Then it will be acceptable to joke about."

Franz sighed. "Five months it is, so." Nigel just looked at him.

"I meant years."

The Alphas departed the command room (with barely concealed joy). Otto and Shelby immediately engaged in a competition to see how annoyed they could make their baby-sitters. Wing resigned himself to the role of mediator, then realised he was too tired to care.

Laura tucked a strand of hair behind her ear. "What do you want, Beauregard? If that's even your name."

"It's not," admitted Vivienne. "Madame Furan chose names for us before we left the Glasshouse to consolidate our back-stories." She sighed. "Look, Laura, it's not your fault."

"What?"

"You were not the leak for the location of the Hunt," she whispered, eyes watching those around them constantly. "You were merely to be the fall man. Nancy's job was to frame you and then you would have been eliminated during the Hunt."

The Alpha's shoulders sagged in relief. "Oh, thank God. Thank you. Thank you so much." Struck by a sudden thought, she looked into the eyes of the girl in front of her, again marvelling at how familiar they seemed. "Then whoâ€|who \_was\_ the leak?"

Vivienne looked guiltily in the directions of the departed Alphas. "Someone who didn't know they were the leak. Someone that the Disciples have been monitoring for little over two months. Someone who had the newest advancements in surveillance technology unknowingly in their ears and around their eyes." Her eyes flickered to the other end of the room. "The devices are made to explode if any doubts arise."

"You can't tell me, can you," said Laura slowly.

The other girl merely nodded. "You would be better off not knowing."

**\*\*H.I.V.E.\*\***

Raven smiled at the already comatose Alphas in the hold of the Shroud. Diabolus Darkdoom merely gazed at the alive(!) form of his son.

"I think they've been there for about two minutes?" questioned the Russian. Darkdoom gave a vaguely committed grunt. Raven just looked at him, perturbed. "â€|Diabolus?"

He rubbed his ear, barely able to disguise his fatigue. "Sorry, just have a terrible headache."

The beginnings of suspicion took root in her mind. "Have you been getting these often?"

"For the past month and a half, really," he admitted. "But it's probably nothing. I'll meet up with you at H.I.V.E. There's something I have to do first."

"The Shrouds have passed the pre-flight tests, Raven," called out a technician. "We're good to go."

Raven nodded slowly, staring at the departing figure of one of G.L.O.V.E.'s best and brightest. "Inform the Shrouds with all of the students that we leave in two minutes." The technician nodded and nodded to his colleagues scattered around the aviation hanger of Valentin Obolensky's Lake Baikal facility. Raven heard the familiar whirr of the Shrouds as doors closed and locked, the engines slowly starting to whine with increased power usage. Soon the cloaking devices would mute such noises and they would all go home. \_Home\_. Still a foreign concept after all of these years.

After the Laura had rejoined her friends, Vivienne had led Raven down to the holding cells to free the captured students. It was a symbolic gesture to show that the girl was now on their side. The students were all tired and the last of them had been loaded up five minutes before. The bodies of the fallen had been treated with the utmost respect and would be commemorated at H.I.V.E. before being returned to their families. Natalya had always hated that part.

She gave one last look to the departed G.L.O.V.E. commander and then climbed inside her own Shroud, nodding to the pilot.

Above them, snow fell into the hangar as the night time sky grew more visible through the broadening gap in the cavern ceiling. Raven's Shroud launched off the pad and engaged the cloaking. The fleet of Shrouds made their way to H.I.V.E., with almost every passenger asleep in the holds.

**\*\*H.I.V.E.\*\***

Diabolus Darkdoom felt relieved to be in the open air, in civilisation. St. Petersburg was as delightful as ever in the afternoon sun but he just wanted to get this over with. He took a taxi to the Palace Square, the pain in his head excruciating. His headache had developed into a full-blown migraine.

His wife stood in silence gazing at the Winter Palace and he felt the same sense of despair as she barely acknowledged his greeting. Again.

Stitches lined a cut along her cheeks and she just looked sadly at him as he fussed over it.

"How many stitches, Lys?" he asked, cursing Valentin Obolensky and Anastasia Furan even more.

"\_C'est rien\_, Diab-" she protested.

"No. Eleven stitches isn't 'nothing,'" he said firmly.

She rolled her eyes. "So you didn't even bother accepting my word for my few scratches. You went straight to the doctor."

"No," he disagreed. "I was looking at the medical report in the Leviathan. I came straight here. To you. I thought you would leave something out."

The Frenchwoman hmpfhed. "I'm so honoured that you would trust me, Diabolus," she drawled. The mocking edge did not go unnoticed.

He felt the same spike of frustration that was so common to their interactions these days. "Well you certainly didn't mention the wound at your side from Worthing's gun," he snapped.

She looked at him defiantly. "There was clearly no point, Darkdoom."

"I'm only concerne-"

"Don't care, Diabolus." Dismissing his worries. As if his opinion did not matter and her mind was already settled. "Like how you are only concerned for me and think not mentioning that our son almost died would worry me unnecessarily. Or that your former best friend and the man I almost married was the one who sent him to die. Not to mention the fact that Anastasia Furan is seemingly back to haunt us again. Do you know who I found that out from? The St. Petersburg commander. The St. Petersburg commander, and not my own husband."

Darkdoom scowled. "As if you don't do the same, dear. Not mentioning how someone tried to kill you seven times was a mistake?"

"Oh please. A bit rich, coming from you. Wasn't that when you, uh, let me think, were supposed to be dead?"

He put his hands up on the air, frustrated beyond belief. "Yet again, you try to guilt-trip me for going into hiding to protect you and Nigel while an insane AI was trying to kill me. Every single argument we have, you can't stop yourself from bringing it up."

Tourists around them were starting to become curious about the argument between the bald man and the head-scarved, sunglasses-wearing woman. An American couple wondered whether these were true city-dwellers and posed for a Kodak moment in front of the handsome couple.

His wife lowered her voice, her own frustration evident with the growing strength of her French accent. "I mention it, Diabolus, because when you went into hiding, you changed us. Our whole relationship suffered. I picked up the weight of your family name and kept Nigel's inheritance safe from the hands of your greedy brothers. Then you came back, with the honour of supreme commander of the League." She looked at him, doing her best not to have a public breakdown. "We used to tell each other everything, Diabolus. No other G.L.O.V.E. couple could match us at our height because we kept nothing from each other. Et maintenant?" She laughed bitterly. "I barely see you because of work. I knew what I was getting into when I married you; I knew that you're a workaholic. But whenever we do talk these days, we just argue. And then ignore the previous argument the

next time and just have another."

Darkdoom's cashmere lined trench coat and \_HermÃ©s\_ scarf (both by who else than his wife) had succeeded in keeping out the Russian cold but now seemed to have utterly failed. His blood seemed to run slower in his veins as he waited for her next words. "So what is it that you want?" he breathed.

She looked at him sadly. "\_Je pense â€œ\_"I think we need a break, Diabolus. Divorce isn't possible considering we never registered our marriage with any government." Her feeble attempt at a joke fell flat as he just stared at her. He had dreaded this moment, knowing that the odds were on his wife jumping ship first. But he was selfish. He knew his marriage was in trouble even before the Renaissance Initiative. He could have ended it between them and left her without the stigma of a G.L.O.V.E. widow before he faked his death. But he didn't because he loved her too much.

"So, it's over," he said hollowly.

She looked up in alarm, her protests silenced by his broken look. "Maybe," she admitted quietly. "I-I should go."

Snow started to fall down on St. Petersburg. Surly locals moaned at the thought but tourists greeted the precipitation with happiness. Snow always made Kodak moments better.

The Frenchwoman turned to leave but Diabolus Darkdoom held her arm in a vice grip. She turned to glare at him. "Diabolus, that's too tight-" He gently pulled her into his arms and kissed her one last time. It was a desperate kiss, full of longing but resignation, lost hope and broken dreams.

Lysette Darkdoom pulled away first.

"I-I have to go, Diabolus, my flight leaves soon." She had to get the train actually, but who knows who could be listening. Her heart shattered even more at the heartbroken look on her (now ex-) husband's face.

Darkdoom just sighed. "I suppose it's for the best," he said slowly. If he was hoping for some dramatic turn-around he was disappointed. "Look after yourself, Lys."

He turned and left, his shoes \_crunch\_ing through the growing layer of snow. A snowflake landed on her cheek as she turned into the wind to watch him leave. The rapidly thawing snowflake mingled with her lone tear. She had cried enough over Diabolus Darkdoom already, she had to be strong, it was for the best.

Then why did all of her carefully and painfully though-out arguments seem useless?

**\*\*Author's Note:\*\***

**\*\*One more chapter folks! All shall be concluded in chapter nineteen (which is [strangely] almost finished). And hooray! I finally gave Mama Darkdoom a nameâ€|and from what the tiny snippet at the end of \*\*\_\*\*Deadlock\*\*\_\*\* told meâ€|canon Mrs D sounds worse than Overlord 0.0\*\***

**\*\*Review if you have the time!\*\***

**\*\*Cairdiuil Paiste\*\***

## 19. Vengeance, War and Secrets

**\*\*Chapter Nineteen\*\***

**\_\*\*The Hunt â€" Conclusion\*\*\_**

**\*\*Author's Note:\*\***

**\*\*Last chapter! Thank you for reading to the end. I started this fanfic just over two years ago. And (50,872) words later, it's finished. Two H.I.V.E. books have come out since then and while some things (obviously) conflict with canon, I'll borrow threads where I can and put my own spin on them. But that's fanfiction for you. Due to the new books, the fic deviated from my own plotline but meh. Satisfied with the final result. Thank you to all who stuck with this and read it. Thank you to the reviewers even more. Special thanks to AlphaFive for the lovely reviews. Thanks dahling! Feedback (regardless of flaming â€" but I've been lucky in that aspect) is always good. \*\***

**\*\*It's been fun further developing writing skills (obsessed with alliteration&|assonance here I come) which will hopefully get me better marks in English. Hopefully.\*\***

**\*\*There are plans to continue this but I will have important exams this year so don't be too optimistic (but hey! Alleviation from studying, right?). I will be going through the chapters and editing them more to my liking but nothing major shall change. As ever, please review if you have time (and especially if you like the idea of a sequel).\*\***

**\*\*Enjoy!\*\***

Nancy Russo inwardly winced as the G.L.O.V.E. operative tossed her carelessly into the back of the Shroud's hold. Her head throbbed with pain and she felt dizzy.

Voices grew louder and softer as she drifted in and out of consciousness. At one point she felt gentle hands examine the wound to the back of her head. The pain caused her to black out again but when she woke she felt so much better. Weak, yet stronger. Shocked, yet calmer. Angry, yet feeling a sense of satisfaction.

Her head was still spinning trying to comprehend what had happened. But she knew that there was someone to blame. And when she remembered there would be hell to pay.

**"â€"|\_need to stop for fuel. Are they still unconscious?"\_**

**"\_The doc said they both have severe head injuries. Apparently one of the H.I.V.E. students took them out. Or was it one from the Glasshouse? Still don't understand how a pair of teenagers get the danger rating just below Raven."\_**

"\_Regardless, we should make a stop. The doctor needs new med supplies and soon. The Hispanic girl's wound might get infected. Nero stressed he wants them alive."\_

"\_Still don't see why we have to be the child-minders. Why can't Raven do it?"\_

The G.L.O.V.E. operatives both sniggered. \_"High on her priorities, of course."\_

"Nancy," came a soft whisper. "No, don't move." In the gloom of the Shroud's hold, she felt someone come up closer. It was Stephen, also sporting a fetching bandage around the head.

Her vision blurred as she sat up, stubbornly ignoring the boy's sighs of exasperation. There was no one else with them.

"What do you remember, Nancy?"

She rubbed her head, wincing at the feeling of blood oozing through the bandages. "Darkdoomâ€|Nigel Darkdoom died. Bu-but then he wasn't dead? And, and - \_oh Godâ€|\_"

Her fellow faux-Alpha nodded gravely. "She has defected. I still don't understand myself. From what I gathered from the guard's chatter (and the pathetic medic), Anastasia fled once all seemed lost. Somehow G.L.O.V.E. regained control of the facility (no doubt due to Vivienne and Darkdoom) and m-my uncle has been captured."

"Oh Stephen," Nancy replied sympathetically. "He was your closest relative."

The boy looked away but she could still see his unshed tears. She felt a surge of guilt as she recognised that she had told her best friend that Obolensky was as good as dead.

"I asked her why. G.L.O.V.E. was making everyone leave and she-she passed me on her way to join them. To join the H.I.V.E. students." Stephen looked at her bitterly. "She just looked at me with such \_pity,\_ a-and told me that Anastasia killed my parents just to take me to the Glasshouse. She took me as leverage against my uncle. It was such, such \_disdain\_, Nan. She basically told me that I couldn't think for myself and was merely a slave to Madame."

Nancy felt a wave of panic. She couldn't lose another ally to the truth. Not another one. "Hey, she was probably lying. That's what she does. That's what we were trained to do. Y'know, 'confuse the enemy' and all that."

Stephen just looked at her. "Maybe." Still quiet, but she could work on it. \_And the doubts would always remainâ€|\_"

Nancy cracked her knuckles. "Now how do we escape, blondie boy?"

He merely looked confused. "...Escape?"

The girl rolled her eyes theatrically. "Well, I can't see the esteemed Maximilian Nero accepting us with open arms. Not with Viv there to poison his opinion. Even though the Madame left us, by returning of our own accord we will gain favour where her former

favourite will lose it."

"Sometimes you actually make sense."

"I'd hit you if you weren't this close to collapsing, three-seven-eight."

They both smiled and Nancy felt that victory and achieving Anastasia Furan's favour were both close in reach. Much had been lost that day, but much could be gained. Much would be gained from this fiasco now that her main rival was gone.

Stephen casually cracked his knuckles. "How shall we make our grand escape?"

Nancy smiled. She thought of the equipment around them. She thought of the careless chatter of the undisciplined guards. She thought of the path to success, power and revenge. Achievements, control and vengeance.

"Leave it to me."

**\*\*H.I.V.E.\*\***

"Sir? We have a new development."

The head of the Central Intelligence Agency's Artemis Unit looked up from his untidy desk. "Malpense?" A constant query.

"No, sir," replied Cassie McLean, one of the elite division's newest operatives. Artemis specialised in finding people who couldn't be found. Cassie and her colleagues would trawl through hundreds of leads each day but most were false hopes. The unit commander hoped that today would be the day he could finally give the President good news.

"It's the man who captured Air Force One."

The commander typed furiously on his keyboard and brought up the video still of the man who had somehow kidnapped the president without any difficulties. The image was clouded and blurry.

He frowned at his subordinate. "McLean, this was the only image found on the servers of Air Force One when we reached the president. After months of analysis we got nothing more than this blurry outline. Are you sure you have him?"

She hesitated. "No sir, but he was rumoured to have been with Otto Malpense during that nuclear crisis in Arizona. We got the lead off a Russian tip-off."

Her superior raised an eye-brow. "Well, I highly doubt it was from the Kremlin."

"No, sir. An anonymous tip-off from the descendent of some old aristocratic family. Says that this man here in the black coat-" she pointed to the pair next to a fountain, "-is some crime lord super villain and that the woman is his wife."

"â€|" The section chief was clearly fascinated by the piece of



nothing-ness.

McLean hurriedly brought out another file. "Apart from the image of the couple" the woman was referred to as 'Settie' "there was also some material on Malpense. And it explains a lot, sir."

The man pulled the file towards him and looked without any visible emotion at the picture of Otto Malpense. It was the same picture that they had; of the boy unconscious on the ground with the president in handcuffs next to him. The day when the nightmare of the capture of Air Force One ended. He frowned.

"It says Malpense has some organic computer in his head? How does that even work?"

"It's not feasible by our technology, sir. Nor by anyone else we know of. Whoever 'grew' it must be a genius. But that's not all. Malpense is not alone."

The leader dude turned the turned the page to find another picture and laid it next to the other one. A girl with hair just as white as that of Otto Malpense.

"Who's Elena Furan?"

**\*\*H.I.V.E.\*\***

All Doctor Maximilian Nero felt was a cold, dark rage.

The lives of fifteen students were so casually ended with the usual lack of respect. Most of the survivors were injured but had passed the life-threatening stage. The Disciples would pay for this. Anastasia Furan would pay for this. And he knew exactly how to do it.

The infamous commander-in-chief of the Global League of Villainous Enterprise resisted the urge to sigh as he looked at the two Alphas in front of him.

Physically, they were none the worse for wear after their little Siberian sojourn. Mentally, he feared that there were wounds that could never be healed. Otto Malpense was sitting patiently, pretending to admire the Turner (but was really trying to look at papers on Nero's desk). Vivienne Beauregard (or whatever Furan called her) was merely fuming. And in a rather familiar way.

Otto had the usual I-know-what-you-don't-know-old-man look on his face. Vivienne merely glowered at the fireplace next to her. In the small, remote, whimsical part of Nero's mind he wondered would it burst into flames with the intense anger the girl radiated. He had always tried to repress that part of his mind.

"I suppose you're wondering why I have you both here," he began, his eyes tracking the Alphas' every move.

Otto seemed to think he knew and Vivienne stopped mentally cursing the hearth. Years of respecting authority (almost) wiped the scowl from her face.

"Overlord," pronounced Otto quietly, gently. Vivienne's shoulders

slumped. "Overlord," she echoed. She looked at Nero in the eyes for the first time since entering the room. "It is because of him that we are here."

Nero compared the two teenagers and realised that Raven's suspicion was correct. "How long have you been wearing contact lenses, Vivienne?"

She looked startled but Otto merely nodded to himself, as if confirming a hunch.

"Since I arrived, Doctor Nero. The Disciples had some of the newest advancements in optics planted in medical supplies. They arrived here and all I had to do was distract the medic and take them." She removed them.

A frighteningly familiar blue. Eyes shared by the young man sitting at her side. Eyes shared by one of the only men that Maximilian Nero had ever feared.

\_Overlord's hubris.\_

"You are a clone," said Nero, gently. "Both of you have an organic supercomputer in your heads that allows you to interface with surrounding technology. Overlord intended for you to be his heirs."

"Yes," said the Alphas. Otto was resigned to the fact that Overlord would never stop haunting him. Vivienne just looked tired.

Nero looked at the girl with sympathy. "Do you know whose genes you share?"

A flicker of emotion showed that she was felt broken. Otto nodded at her, feeling somehow relieved that he was not alone.

"As far as I know, it's of - \_I'm\_ Anastasia Furan."

The face was the very same that had screamed at him in defiance when the first Glasshouse fell. The face was the same that had haunted his dreams for so long. Except, of course, for the eyes.

Nero reclined in his chair and rang a bell. His butler came in with a tray. He left and the Alphas were given fine-bone china cups, filled with liquorice and peppermint tea. He found that it was soothing and nothing reassured and coaxed to talk more than tea. The Alphas politely sipped at their tea. Rumours of those unfortunates that were spoon-fed medicine came to mind.

"I had always wondered why Anastasia Furan took up the helm of the Disciples. When Overlord was vanquished it was considered a sinking ship. A suicidal venture. But it would be more justifiable if Furan had more links to Overlord than thought."

"Madame Furan said that I was her price for everlasting loyalty. Mere insurance, an investment. Once the cloning process became more viable, Otto â€" the 0110th specimen â€" was created, with me following suit. Otto was sent to an orphanage while I was raised at the Glasshouse."

Nero nodded, answers to questions long queried falling into place. Now to other mattersâ€¦

"Did you ever see him?" interrupted Otto, a hungry gleam in his eyes, "Overlord?"

His fellow clone looked at him, having expected this question. "He received reports on my progress (and yours) each month but I went to his orbital platform twice. The last time was the month before hisâ€¦|ehâ€¦|host was spectacularly cremated."

Nero interrupted the subsequent question with a hint of impatience. "Yes, yes. You can talk later. We need to decide what is to be done with you, Vivienne."

The Alphas looked apprehensive. Outside the bell for the change of classes sounded.

"Anastasia, it seems, has sent out a contract for you. To be taken alive. Were we to send you to another G.L.O.V.E. base, too many mercenaries would see an opportunity. Thus, you are to remain here, as an Alpha with the others. I expect complete adherence to the institute rules and you will have an increased workload to fill certain gaps in your education." Nero gave his I-know-what's-best-and-don't-snigger-children frown.

"This one didn't know who Harry Potter is," said Otto, shaking his head. Vivienne scowled. "Still think it's something to do with clay."

Nero ignored them and a vein began pulsing at his temple. "You may be pulled out of Tactical Education if you endanger students."

Otto's whim to laugh evaporated at Vivienne's disappointed face.

"-in order to pass off the similarity between you two, we shall pass you off as twins and shall share surnames. I expect full cooperation."

The Alphas looked at each other. "Bags older twin," smirked Otto. "\_Cretin,"\_ spat Vivienne. Otto had a pained look on his face. "So you know the word 'cretin' but don't know who Harry Potter is?!"

Nero sighed inwardly. "And of course, you will tell me everything you know about the Disciples, Vivienne. Including the co-ordinates of the Glasshouse."

"I don't know them." She was met with stares of disbelief. "Raven knew and brought G.L.O.V.E. to destroy the first facility. The Madame was not going to make that mistake again. Whenever an operative left, they were picked up by a helicopter or given the location of a nearby facility."

"Of course," said Nero. "And with that point, you are both dismissed. H.I.V. will send information to consolidate your new back-story and I expect you at 9am sharp tomorrow morning, Vivienne. You are to tell me about the Disciples then."

"Why not now?" she asked. Her answer was an index finger pointing to Otto. "I also have other matters to which I must attend but I may call on your collective assistance later," added Nero. He smiled (not a particularly charming one). "And then I must deal with the Disciple's spy."

If Otto was a dog, his ears would have pricked up. "Who?"

"Certain \_intel\_ informed us and the spy is being detained now. I understand they were an unwilling accomplice of Furan. We will be subtle." Nero shuffled the papers on his desk, glaring at Otto as he strained his neck to see them. "The first move in a new game has played out. I intend to finish the Disciples for what they have done to us. The League cannot be seen to be weak in this new war. You two are excused. Off you go and tell Nigel Darkdoom to come in."

"Wait," blurted out Vivienne. "I haven't told you the main reason as to why I defected." She turned slowly to Otto. "There are more of us. Madame Furan found the technology used to create us and recently succeeded in perfecting the process." She looked at Nero and he could clearly see the fear she was trying to hide. "They are stronger, faster and better than us. Devoid of human emotions, they seek only to carry out Overlord's wishes. They are using the Madame as much as she is using them. They must be destroyed."

Nero had always wondered if this would happen. His worst fears were coming to life before him.

"They are still being formed, yes?" At the girl's uncertain nod, he ploughed ahead. "Then the ruling council shall be informed and we will take care of it. To your studies, Alphas!" The Alphas in question groaned in unison. They left and Nigel Darkdoom soon entered the room.

"You wanted to see me, sir?" he said cautiously. The boy looked more like his father than Nero had ever seen him. The man smiled.

"May I congratulate you, young man! Following in the family tradition!" He inwardly smiled as Nigel attempted to mask his groan with a cough. "You wanted to see me?" he repeated. Nero didn't miss the lack of an honorific.

"Yes, Nigel. It's about your parents."

"Are they alright?! Has anything happened?!"

Nero tried to put him at ease. "They're fine, for the most part. Your mother was found and freed but I called you here to talk about your father." He looked gravely at the boy. "It appears your father was the leak to the Disciples."

Nigel Darkdoom was shocked. "No-no-he wouldn't-you're wrongâ€¦!"

Nero cut off his babble with a dismissive wave of his hand. "He was an unwilling participant, Nigel. The Disciples had a spy among his own people and the latest in surveillance technology was implanted in his head. His eyes and ears to be exact." He peered at the Darkdoom boy. "We will feign a medical exam once he reaches the Island. But we need to turn off the devices and I believe you can help me."

Nigel looked like a deer caught in headlights. "How exactly?"

Doctor Maximilian Nero smiled. "You do remember what happened to the Henchmen Block and Tackle, don't you?"

**\*\*H.I.V.E.\*\***

Diabolus Darkdoom nodded to Raven who had come to escort the Megalodon to H.I.V.E. "Nero didn't think I know my way by now?" he joked with barely any enthusiasm.

Raven gave him a look.

"Does all of womankind hate me now?" he muttered under his breath, too low for Raven to hear. Or at least he thought that.

"I'll ask you about that later but first I'd like to pay you back for something."

He looked suspicious. "What?"

She smiled evilly. "For shooting me." And promptly decked him.

"Whash wrong wi' you, Waven? You dinish talk to Lysh?" She pinched a nerve ending behind his back and he slumped into unconsciousness. Raven poured the Argentblum/Darkdoom Rainbow Tan (Shine Like a Rainbow Wherever You Go! Patent pending) on his head, paying special attention to his ears and eyes.

"Can you jam the signal?" she mouthed to the two shadows at the door.

The Alphas rolled their eyes in unison. "Can pigs fly?" uttered Otto sarcastically. "It's been jammed before we boarded," added Vivienne smugly. Otto sighed dramatically. "Oh the irony. If only I had the clearance to mock Nigel about this. It can be part of your assimilation into normal society," he told Vivienne. "It's delightfully fun."

Raven was beginning to think that uniting these two would bring trouble. She could barely manage Otto on his own. But then again, when was life ever simple?

**\*\*H.I.V.E.\*\***

The Fab Four (+ Franz and Nigel) sat together on the sofas in their Accommodation Block.

"How many were killed on the Hunt?" asked Shelby glumly.

"Fifteen, I be thinking. From all four streams," replied Franz as the Alphas slipped back into their state of glumness. Sadness and rage.

"Why do they even bring students like the SciTechs? It's pointless," said Laura bitterly.

Wing just looked at the other survivors sitting near the waterfall. "I believe Nero considers it to be a bonding exercise. Ordinarily,

Raven would catch the weakest first and they would be in no real danger. Some Alphas from previous years led a group of all streams to twenty-one hours a few years ago." He felt a surge of guilt, thinking of the SciTechs he left behind at the behest of Shelby and Nancy. His girlfriend squeezed his hand, knowing what the dark look on his face meant.

"Life sucks," said Shelby. The others murmured assent.

"There are some perks," said Nigel, pensively. The others looked at him in disbelief.

"Liquid happiness."

"Oh yes," muttered Otto sarcastically. "Hot chocolate solves everything."

"I agree with Nigel," Franz replied in indignation. "And of course once we be graduating, there shall be no more 'Politics Through the Ages' assignments." The others again murmured assent. Apart from the constant threat of death, the decreased life-expectancy and the virtually nil chance of ever settling down to a semi-normal life, 'Politics Through the Ages' assignments were the bane of their lives.

"This is war," pronounced Otto. "You should have seen Nero's face whenever he mentioned Anastasia Furan. Even Raven seems frightened of her." They all shuddered. "For once I am glad being here," said Franz, stroking his chin. The Alphas fervently praised H.I.V.E.'s security. An uncommon occurrence.

Nigel nodded to the figure entering a cell above them. "Can we trust her?"

Franz looked at him with concern. His friend had been more quiet than usual and Franz knew he was worrying about something. They all had their secrets.

The Alpha pack looked to Otto. "Well?" asked Laura primly. "Your meeting with Nero and Furan's goon?"

Otto scowled fiercely. "Don't call her that. It wasn't her fault."

"Lemme guess," drawled Shelby. "You don't plan on telling us about what went down. You have a lot of secrets, old man."

Wing went for the gentler approach. "Otto? Can we trust Vivienne?"

The white-haired boy considered his friends. Wing and Shelby, patient and impatient, respectively. Nigel, apprehensive. Franz, curious. And Laura—he winced inwardly. Like their relationship couldn't get any more convoluted. He never knew what was going through her head.

"Yes," he said finally. "But give her time. It actually turns out thatâ€¦" \_here goes nothing\_ "â€¦Vivienne is my twin." He was met with the expected disbelief.

"Twin," replied Laura sceptically. \_"Twin."\_

Shelby sighed theatrically. "You don't look alike, Otto. Requesting more info." The three boys just eyed him up like wolves contemplating dinner.

"She has blue eyes too, has the same connection with inorganic material and also has white hair under the hair dye. Satisfied?"

The Alpha pack retreated at the don't-go-there-you-stupid-idiot's tone. They would hunt for information again. Rrrrrrrl.

"But remember, Otto." Franz looked piercingly at Otto. "The trust is earned. Not given. Who is being up for the chocolate run?" The two girls agreed to go, giving off gossip vibes and Franz practically towed Nigel behind him.

Only Wing remained.

"I hope you know what you are doing," he offered quietly. "I am here if you want to talk."

Otto thought of how he came to be, how Vivienne came to be, the other clones, Overlord's relentless presence and all of the other secrets he kept from his friends. He looked grimly at his roommate, feeling as hollow and superficial as he always did when he contemplated his life as a clone. "You would be better off not knowing. Believe me."

**\*\*H.I.V.E. \*\***

Vivienne quietly entered her room to find a familiar face in unfamiliar clothes.

"Adeline! What are you wearing?"

The girl fidgeted with the cuff of her grey jumpsuit. "I've transferred to the Political and Financial Stream," she said softly. "Apparently the Hunt is used to confirm streams and Nero thinks I will be better off as a PoliFi. Arthur's transferring too." She looked sad yet relieved. "I'll still be your roommate though, and we may still have classes together."

Vivienne sat on her bed, pensive. "Why did you really change?" At once Adeline Yen Li became unreadable. "We all have our secrets, Vivienne. And I cannot take anymore of what happened in Siberia. Nor can Arthur. Some of us are not built for this life," she added bitterly. She promptly left with the half-baked excuse of 'mixing with the other PoliFis.' Credible.

A little voice in the back of her head wondered where the Madame was now. Vivienne had given the location of some Disciple cells to Nero and by now G.L.O.V.E. would be on the warpath. Life would go on as norm but she would be on an unfamiliar side. She just hoped that she had made the right choice.

She rose and wandered into the small bathroom, wiping away the condensation on the mirror. The same face that haunted her dreams looked back at her. The pronounced cheekbones, the sharp nose, the bitter mouth. The same wave of disgust rose like bile at the back of

her throat. Ever since Madame Furan had told her that she was not an individual, that she was a mere copy of \_her\_, Vivienne had felt so lost. Before, she would have given anything to please the woman. Now, she cursed her with every breath she drew.

Peering in the mirror, she noted that her white roots were beginning to show. The dark brown dye had lasted longer than expected. The thought of returning to the same old snow-white was nauseating. It brought up memories of pain and discipline, oppression and mindless servitude.

Black would be a nice alternative.

Vivienne eyed the knife that Madame Furan had almost killed her with. No-one had come to take it away. Picking it up, she admired the plain hilt and the sharp, sharp blade. She cut off her long plait in one swift movement. It \_thumped\_ onto the ground and was followed by lock after lock as the girl hacked away at her hair, leaving it short and spiky.

It only made her eyes stand out more.

She would not stop until her fellow clones (bar Otto) were dealt with. No-one seemed to understand how dangerous they would be. She would show them. She would end Overlord's final war before it started. Nero and the League would not believe her. She would bide her time. And end Anastasia Furan.

A means to the final end.

Blue eyes met their twin in the mirror.

\_Even if the world burned with her.\_

**\*\*FINIS\*\***

**\*\*(Final) Author's Note:\*\***

**\*\*Made it past the 50,000 words mark! And with the longest chapter! Yeoow!\*\***

**\*\*Finally finished : )\*\***

**\*\*SlÃ¡n! Adios! Au revoir!\*\***

**\*\*Cairdiuil Paiste\*\***

End  
file.